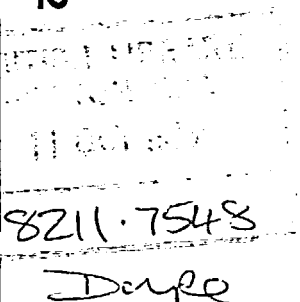


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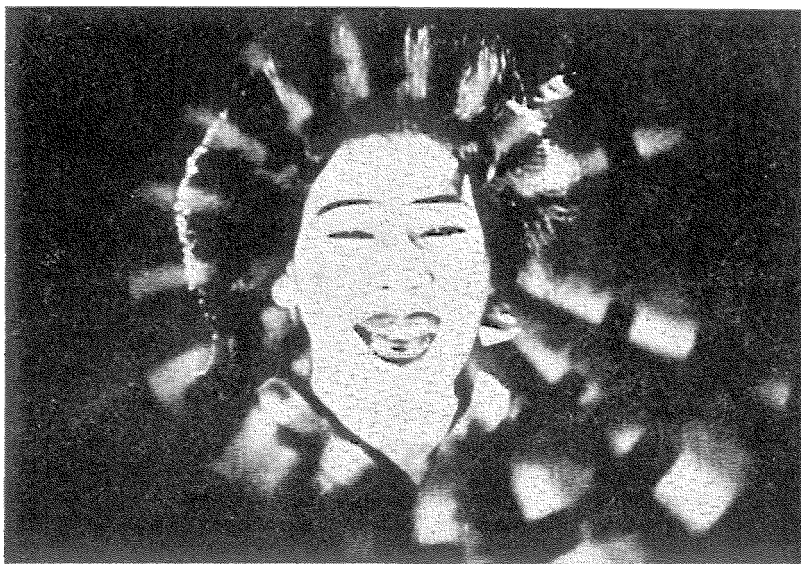
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Editorial

Much recent discussion of the cinematic avant-garde has centred on the place of narrative within it, and certain film-making practices have set themselves the aim of rejecting, or totally undermining the narrative construction of mainstream cinema, or any alternative narrative system. Peter Gidal's films and writings – we publish here an article written in 1978: 'The Anti-Narrative' – represent an important strand in this tradition in this country. His article employs a practice of writing described by Deke Dusinberre¹ as eschewing 'a "transparent technique" to the extent of adopting an almost opaque style,' a self-conscious use of language in which the reader has to work to 'make sense' of the text, passing through a '*frisson* of contradiction, repetition and humour'. In his afterword to Gidal's article, Stephen Heath draws out a number of Gidal's arguments; he sees them as contradictorily both 'against representation' and for 'a more complex engagement with specific terms and relations of representation'.

But within the avant-garde, Gidal's is not the only position. As Felix Thompson points out in his article, there are other practices which attempt a different engagement with narrative forms, practices which cannot be read productively within an anti-narrative discourse. There is also a danger in taking at its face value the avant-garde's claim to be engaging in a practice that is radically 'other' than the cinematic mainstream. Raymond Bellour, in his article in this number provides a useful corrective to this. In examining the different senses in which we understand repetition to operate in cinema, Bellour indicates how it conditions textual construction both in main-stream narrative, and anti-narrative avant-garde and experimental cinematic practices.

In the current number of *Screen Education* (n13) Raymond Williams discusses the problems of holding together analysis of

1 Deke Dusinberre, 'Consistent Oxymoron – Peter Gidal's Rhetorical Strategy', *Screen*, Summer 1977, v18 n2.

- 10 the forms of the media with a practical relationship to their conditions of production:

'There has been this absolute efflorescence of intellectual analysis which, although it has been very valuable, is also related to the practical blocks on production. Many people doing analysis would have been doing production in different circumstances. This has had positive and negative effects. Positively, we do have a much more serious body of analysis than I can even remember. On the other hand, it can become a self-sufficient activity – it can become theoreticist, because it has its own pleasures and it also reflects a certain situation within educational institutions.

The trouble with the thinking about institutions has always been finding ways of connecting it with the ordinary political system. When I wrote *Communications* in the early 1960s, there seemed to be a connection because it contained the sort of transitional reforms people felt a Labour government could undertake. In practice, once the Labour government was in office, they entirely dropped that connection. Although people have gone on working and managed to get certain initiatives taken up from time to time – at the level of manifestos or policy documents – the transition hasn't occurred.'

Analysis has been *Screen's* priority, but much of the effectivity of *Screen's* analytical work stems from the political implications of the psycho-analytic and semiotic discourses it has explored. These implications centre on the development of practices which will alter the balance of forces within discursive formations and institutions. However, there is a danger of simply transferring concepts from analyses concerned with language phenomena (in the broadest sense) directly to the area of institutions and power: 'repression' is one example of this transfer, and in his article in this number, Paul Abbott exposes the deep-rootedness of this quid pro quo in much contemporary politico-cultural writing and the difficulties of sustaining it theoretically and politically. The development of a radical practice of cinema will involve the production of critical discourses directed at production, distribution and exhibition of films as well as film texts themselves, and thus also Williams' connections with the 'ordinary political system'. Some of these issues will be taken up in the SEFT Weekend School 'Independent Cinema: Pre- and Post-Text' (see p 6).

With this number we welcome John Caughie, Ian Connell, Phillip Drummond, Mick Eaton and Mary Kelly to the Editorial Board. Kari Hanet retires after many years as a member of the Board. The next number of *Screen*, to be published at the end of the year, will be a double issue.

MARK NASH

Authority

Paul Abbott

Preliminary

This article takes its point of departure in an appreciation and a certain dissatisfaction, which have as their object the body of analyses of power produced in and around the work of Michel Foucault. The merits of these analyses are well-known, and do not need spelling out here; at the same time, it can be argued that, precisely in granting power its specific autonomy, these analyses introduce a new problem: the strategy of power is granted its own rationale which, by definition, cannot fail to be fulfilled. Power, and its practices and institutions, thus appears omnipotent. The decisive criticism of this conception is that it paralyses political analysis; it leaves nothing to be said and nothing to be done. To avoid this position, it is necessary to produce a type of analysis which will return the role of contradiction as productive of change, which will identify sites of struggle and conditions of possible intervention.

The theme chosen for this analysis is 'authority'. Authority designates the articulation of authoritative knowledge on to authoritarian power at the strategic nodes of the power-knowledge conjuncture: hence the concern of the present article with the institutions of education and the cinema, the dominant forms in which currently authoritative knowledge (specifically, knowledges of the subject, the 'psy-complex', ie the ensemble of discourses and practices supported on psychological science) enters on social practices. Authority evaluates knowledges and practices in terms of their relation to power, and is thus able to calculate the feasibility, value and possible outcomes of particular activities and struggles, providing the focus of a politically practical analysis of a social formation. Where concentration on power has led to conceptualisations which are intractably global, or too simply dual and conspiratorial, authority – to complete this preliminary defi-

- 12 nition – names the specific forms in which the facts of power are represented, and the effects of those representations. It is this concern with the specific material effects of a regime of representation, the production of the subject 'in place' for authority, and with the knowledge on which that regime is predicated, which is developed as the link between education and the cinema in their institutional operation of authority.

This article, then, has two specific institutions as its object: education, and the cinema. Both are of immediate concern to SEFT members, but they are also presented *together* here in their area of convergence on certain knowledges and practices of the subject, and the operations of social authority at work and at risk in those knowledges and practices. The point of their final convergence in this article is given as a consideration of possible mobilisation of the two together: that is, of setting to work the knowledge-practices of cinema theory within and against the knowledge-practices of education, with the aim of producing a calculable practical critique of authority, that is of effecting changes in the discursive and non-discursive practices of authority as a result of struggles joined in two of SEFT's areas of concern, cinema and education. To help the reader appreciate the force of this convergence, to justify its postulation, the argument is conducted through separate surveys of education and cinema. The cross-reference and mutual relevance of the various sections may be clarified, however, and more easily borne in mind during reading, if the general course of the article is anticipated here.

The introduction develops the conceptual machinery which sustains the article, considering the place which the category of the subject, and psychoanalytic concepts in general, may legitimately occupy in analyses of social power and authority; the 'repressive hypothesis' serves as a polemical target against which to develop these considerations. The second section delineates the linked set of target areas which the article addresses: as the résumé of the Freudian account of the subject makes clear, the constitution of super-ego, culture and authority all bear witness to the necessary simultaneity of forms of subjectification and subjection; all demonstrate the material effects of regimes of representation and identification, of constructions and fabrications of place, which have been recognised by studies of ideology and, in particular, by accounts of the ideological effects of cinema. There is a further link, however: super-ego, culture and authority are shown to share a constitutional *inertia*, a fundamental conservatism which is to be the object of the kinds of intervention theorised in the article.

Intervention does not go ahead in a vacuum, but in relation to specific material practices; it is with the aim of theorising an institutional corpus of these practices that the third section examines education: an absolutely crucial site, since education

is not only the dominant institution for the production of the subject of authority at present, but also, by virtue of the knowledges and practices of the subject which it operates, the strategic node with which the knowledges and practices of film theory can engage to produce the most effective restructurations of the power-knowledge conjuncture. If SEFT's commitment to education is to be taken seriously, it is precisely this kind of intervention of film theory into the institutional politics of education which should concern it. The length and detail of the treatment of education given here, outlining the political effects of institutional pedagogic practices in constructing and perpetuating an authority which they are constitutionally unable to challenge, is justified not only by the internal logic of the article, but also by the fact that this section attempts to break some ground which may be new within the pages of *Screen*, but which must also be recognised as important for SEFT's project.

To speak of a project, of a 'political' intervention: precisely what is at issue here? The question turns, of course, on the weight given to the term 'political'. As it recurs throughout this article, 'political' never means *less* than relating to the balance of forces of the power conjuncture, and to the effects produced in that by particular struggles. It is evident, however, that this is a relatively 'weak' sense of 'political': effects will be produced in the power conjuncture not only by economic change, but also, say, by struggles which mobilise knowledges and representations, that is, struggles which are customarily designated 'ideological'. The question thus concerns the existence of the political as a separate instance, and it remains an open question throughout this article; the conclusion reflects on the significance of the question itself, but does not profess to give it an answer. Indeed – to anticipate the tenor of those reflections – the difficulty of answering the question of the political as a separate instance suggests that it may not be well-posed or pertinent; it is not clear, in fact, that a *general* category of the political would be a particularly valuable tool of analysis, or that its absence need detain the analysis of *specific* practices and struggles, at which level the political can always be re-posed and elaborated according to the needs of the analysis in progress.

To sum up the first half of the article, a section on power, politics, and authority draws out the definition of authority which has been arrived at, relating this to the constitution of the social subject.

Reconverging on these themes of the social subject, the subject of authority, as constituted by various practices, among which education is crucial, the second half of the article deals more specifically with cinema. Having shown how a form of knowledge (specifically, the knowledges of the 'psy-complex') can programme a set of social practices, it will be demonstrated that cinema's

- 14 ideological practice is determined by the same strategy of authority as was found underlying education, the strategy of operating a kind of policing of places and identifications available to the subject.

It might be objected that the relation of cinema and education carried out here in terms of authority is deficient in consideration of actual film texts. This apparent neglect is not necessarily damning, however, and certainly has its justification. There are more ways of writing about cinema than simply writing about films, since cinema is more than the set of texts it produces: as an institution, it extends over a whole corpus of discursive and non-discursive practices, of which, say, reviewing and theory are as much part as are the making and viewing of films. What determines the choice of object from this corpus is not some criterion of essentiality (the film text as more cinematic than, say, its conditions of distribution or reception) but rather the needs and aims of the analysis in hand. On these grounds it can be argued that the programmatic knowledges which sustain the practices of film theory are a proper strategic choice for current analysis in relation to the practices of authority, and it is these considerations which the final section of the article takes up, exploiting that shift in the power-knowledge conjuncture which has made it possible to reflect on the practices of the subject as the foundation of an authoritarian programme.

The final section is, in addition, a response to recent recognition of the need to distinguish among the subjects of psychoanalysis, linguistics, and ideology; it attempts to take up the definition of discourse as a process of alignment of subjects, finding in this the authoritative work of a regime of representation and subjectification-subjection. In conclusion, the article uses its concept of authority to pose a politics of knowledge: a way of evaluating struggles in discursive and non-discursive practices in terms of the knowledge mobilised, and of calculating the conditions of interventions in those struggles. The article, then, finds its point of convergence here: consideration of the strategic couple of film theory and educational practice, and its importance in producing an operational critique of authority.

I Political Theory of Authority

Introduction: On 'Repression'

To begin, then, this article offers a critique of a certain tendency of theory, for example the work of Althusser and Reich, to refer the question of power and authority to one of domination and repression, that is, to reduce structure and struggle to class polarity

and duality. Even in the politico-economic terms in which it is to be properly specified, this concentration on a simple class repression, and the instrumentalist conception of the state to which it gives rise, can be demonstrated to be mistaken: within any given social formation the coexistence of several various modes of production entails the coexistence of several overlapping classes and thus a kind of diffused domination through the plural recruitment to the power block of several class fragments.¹ Such a criticism, however, is no more than an amendment; it sophisticates the conceptualisation of repression, but fails to displace it. The displacement is necessary because it is in the terminological introduction of 'repression' that Reich and Althusser actually fall behind the contemporaneity of the concepts offered by psychoanalysis; in using its language, they take least account of its implications. Two things are therefore involved in this introduction: it is necessary to criticise the (mis)taking of 'repression' as coextensive with the authoritarian function; and to begin a recovery of the psychoanalytic contribution to the discourse of political analysis.

Where psychoanalysis is founded on a refusal to accept the conscious as the essence of the psychical, the political theory of repression constantly threatens to reinscribe the subjectivity which Marx had worked to decentre, by the attribution of a consciousness. One step away from a kind of conspiracy theory, this position places too great an emphasis on a certain self-evidence of the operation of power 'by' one class 'against' another; if it postulates an instrumental state, the repression theory must also find a cognisant and directive consciousness as its operative agency; and, internal to its own political discourses, it is this attribution of intentionality which founds the unity of the 'political' as a category.

Admittedly, to a limited extent the attribution of consciousness is justifiable; there is a certain sense in which the cognitive model is useful, in so far as authority works in part by recognisable marking of certain subjects (schoolchildren, criminals, the insane, the unemployed, etcetera) and by the fabrication of imaginary representations (national, sexual and class stereotypes, etcetera), techniques which are reliant on conscious perception. The word for this process, however, in which authority designs a political destiny on the represented body of the subject, is not repression, but *discrimination*; whereas repression banishes its object into the unconscious, forgets and attempts to forget the forgetting, discrimination must constantly invite its representations into consciousness, reinforcing the crucial recognition of difference which they embody and revitalising them for the perception on which its effectivity depends. And while there is certainly a repression

1 cf Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, NLB, London, 1975, pp 229-245.

- 16 of any awareness that these representations are constructed in an imperfectly coherent *bricolage* of various discourses – an impossible awareness, since it would run into consciousness the *heterogeneity* of the subject as a place of articulation – their operation, though oppressive, is never strictly repressive: it must sustain itself on the *presence* of the very difference which is also its object. But if the operation has as its end the re-cognition of difference in ego-consciousness, the reality principle and control of motility being there the entrepreneurs of its action and access to 'the world', it must also be stressed that its own working-up of difference, its work of preconstruction, is effaced, repressed; this repression of production entails that the recognition of difference is procured in an innocence, as a 'nature'; recognition is contrived as primary cognition, spontaneous effect of the 'evidence' of the visible. And if this bears witness to the power of regimes of representation, it must do so silently for the subject, and, for society, deafeningly . . .

It emerges, therefore, that the concept of consciousness can be mobilised only in so far as repression proper is left out of question; conversely, repression cannot be attributed to conscious processes: subjects in analysis have resistances and repressions which they cannot consciously recognise even when told of them. Obvious but radical, this proposition that the act of repression is unconscious implies not only that the 'ego is no longer master in its own house', but also, since the ego's defensive repressions are carried out without its awareness of them, that part of the ego itself is claimed by the unconscious.

The role of consciousness and cognition in the operations of authority is thus to be closely restricted, having its place as part of a struggle within representation; it must not be extended across the whole of that struggle, a mistake Foucault appears to make in the 'popular memory' debate:

'Memory is an important factor of struggle (it is, indeed, in a dynamic conscious of history that struggles develop). People are shown, not what they were, but what they must remember they were; the point is to oppose that blockage, the effects of those apparatuses, to return people their real memory.'²

The overvaluation of consciousness returns the intentionality of a conspiracy theory, homogenises the 'people' and assumes a mistakenly positivistic stable *evidence* of the political; but what could it be, this unitary 'real memory'? Subverting the would-be guarantees of 'reality', plenitude and truth as guides to political action, what is decisive is the constant intervention of *fantasy* in memory and representation, interposing the space of unconscious

2 Michel Foucault, 'Entretien', *Cahiers du Cinéma* n. 251-2, July-August 1974, p. 7. Translations in *Radical Philosophy* no. 11, and *Edinburgh Magazine* '77, 1977 pp. 20-25.

desire so that, in politics as elsewhere, 'what is at issue is less remembering than rewriting the history'.³ 17

A further vitiation of the repressive-instrumentalist theory, as of Foucault's position sketched above, is its need to conceive dominant and dominated classes on the model of *agents*, as *subjects* for the postulated consciousness, cognition and memory. Althusser's treatment of the definition of the state as class-state provides an incidental underscoring of this tendency: the writing falls immediately into those metaphors of light and vision (the definition 'casts a brilliant light', allows us to 'glimpse', to 'identify and recognise the facts of oppression by relating them to the state'⁴) which are the constant correlate of the category of the subject in materialist discourse from Descartes on, through La Mettrie, through Marx and Freud, to be resumed in their literality in the discourses of the cinema.

What is wrong with the concept of class-subjects? First, it reduces the scope of individual action and consciousness to nothing: self-sufficient in knowledge and intention, the class struggle rolls on autonomously, as a kind of battle of giants, to an apparently inevitable end. Second, when coupled with the axial theory of authority as domination and repression, this theorisation on the analogy of subjective agents gives rise to a dual, polar formulation: class-subjects (or a popular-subject and the state-as-subject) oppose each other across the disposal of power as force (in Althusser's 'repressive state apparatuses') or as knowledge (in the 'ideological state apparatuses'). Note that the ideological state apparatuses are, strictly, not other than repressive, but continue that repression and polarity, being in binary distinction from the force of the (overtly) repressive apparatuses on the one hand, and on the other from a putative 'free' knowledge, a 'Theory' of 'scientific' Marxism.

The outcome of these polarities is then a conception of *politics* as a struggle of class agents for the disposal of state power; Althusser puts the position with typical clarity:

'The State is a 'machine' of repression . . . The whole of the political class struggle revolves around the State. By which I mean around the possession, ie the seizure and conservation of State power.'⁵

The difficulty and necessity for political analysis is to escape from this conception of power as a possession, as a transferable capacity to dominate another; in its binary nature, with its dual poles of subject identities, this conception of power is still trapped in an imaginary, prior to a symbolic order in which power-knowledge

3 J Lacan, *Le Seminaire, I*, Paris, 1975, p 20.

4 L Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, NLB, London, 1971, p 133.

5 Ibid, p 134.

18 features in figures of authority, fantastic representations, not of the Real, but real in their effects. Outside the paranoia of the imaginary dyad, it's necessary to pose power not as an attendant attribute of subjects, but as a determining element in the structuration of subjectivity and the social relations and practices in which subjects are engaged. There is a suffusing matrix of power (which can, with caution, be compared to that of language, insofar as there is no subject outside its terms, although at the same time its terms do not exhaust the subject, do not give it in its historicity); without lapsing into structural causality, the task is then to analyse how the modes of subjectification (power, and others: notably language and representation, but always in specific discourses and practices) work across one another to condition the possibilities of relations and practices, struggles and outcomes.

To deal with power and authority in the terms of consciousness, intentionality and individualism (the terms raised by Althusser), while still holding to an economic determination 'in the last instance', already creates obvious problems: subjects are said to act in compliance with 'interests' prescribed from a general and ultimately dogmatic theory – but when they do not? And when they refuse to recognise those 'real' interests? Hence Althusser's problematic juxtaposition of ideology and unconscious . . . Further, these terms can lead back into a certain logical cartesianism, a conception of the subject which, lapsing back from that of psychoanalysis, is both *simple* (ie unified, integral), and magisterial in its dismissal of an equally monolithic unconscious from any role in psychic activity; it reinscribes a *cogito* which really is master, against which there can be no 'return of the repressed'. This re-enthronement of the *cogito* (at the level of the classes in struggle or, by extension, of their individual 'representatives') hampers political analysis by losing sight of power as anything other than a logic, and especially as a structuring force running beyond the consciousness of the individuals and classes it interpellates. The opposite view must not be pushed too far, however: to locate power entirely in the unconscious, to inscribe it simply as an investment of desire, is to risk a different kind of global subjectivism in which power is a new kind of anthropological function; the point is rather to account for both the experience of subjects and the structuring of subjectivity which founds that experience, and to this end the claims of psychoanalysis must be reasserted in criticism of a cartesianism in which consciousness is primary, the subject is whole and coherent, and power and repression are unitary and calculable, a one-way direction of force from source to object.

The critique of the *cogito*'s presuppositions of coherence can be mounted in terms of a theory of sexuality and the unconscious. Any claim to a unitary coherence of consciousness is founded on an absolute division from, and negation of, the repressed, which

is defined from the standard of an *essentialism* (the 'normal' the 'self') and thus also of a functional teleology (development become destiny when viewed from its 'end'). For psychoanalysis, on the other hand, the course of development of sexuality is not already assigned by its own self-regulatory logic, the child is not the 'essential' adult *in potentia* (as theories of 'stages', 'levels', '*les singeries de l'apprentissage*',⁶ would have it); the child is rather the site of a polymorphous and diffuse sexuality – the fundamental condition of sexuality altogether – which is then closed down into a socially determined 'normality' by a series of identifications and repressions. Thus the ego is never self-determinant in its sexuality, since the power and direction of the repressions are 'borrowed' in the various identifications; there is no original directive ego, since the ego is first set up in (*as*) this sum of conflicts which it does not antedate. Even within the general falsity of genetic-causative models, then, authority can never stand as the simple 'cause' or punctual 'origin' of repression, since authority is itself set up in the play of repressions (of the forbidden desire to replace the Father, modulated in the ideal injunction to resemble him, to take up the place of the Father.)

The logical cartesianism which dismisses 'perversion' and posits a 'normal' sexuality with an assigned development directed by a preconstituted ego can thus be exposed as untenable within the terms of psychoanalysis; further, it can be shown that its presence in political analysis, where it again tends to reduce a polymorphous complexity to a simple axis of authoritarian repression, has certain detrimental effects. As an illustration, such an analytic practice is inadequate to deal with fascism, a political regime which everybody would want to call '*authoritarian*', but the nature of which cannot be specified in terms of a linear *repressive* operation of power, working 'from the top down', as Reich attempts to do:

'In the figure of the father the authoritarian state has its representative in every family, so that the family becomes its most important instrument of power . . . What this position of the father actually necessitates is the strictest sexual suppression of the women and children.'⁷

This misconception of a unified sexuality which can be 'suppressed' once for all is the counterpart of those normative judgements which irresponsibly present fascism as perversion, offering an alibi to the self-assured *cogito*. As Barthes points out:

'Fascism is too grave and insidious a threat to be handled in a simple analogy . . . who wouldn't sigh with relief: "I'm not like

6 Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Pour une Politique de la Psychanalyse*, Paris 1977, p 147.

7 W Reich, *The Mass Psychology Of Fascism*, New York, 1970, p 53.

20 them; I'm not a fascist because I'm not a coprophiliac!"⁸

In fact, with its concept of the polymorphously perverse, the theory of sexuality offers political analysis a distinction between fascism-as-system (historically unified and localised, like the actualisation of perversion or the onset of neurosis) and fascism-as-substance (not ahistorical, but distributed throughout every subject and formation). This conceptualisation of fascism-as-substance undermines the ability of the *cogito* to disavow the active presence of fascist elements, always available for structuring overdetermination; like perversion, like neurosis, fascism is never beyond the pale of a securely circumscribed 'normality', never something which 'can't happen here' . . .

Insofar as it displaces a blind dogmatism, this formulation is some advance. It can't be left at that, however. What calls out for theorisation is the specificity of the historical localisation, and this in turn demands an analysis of the articulation of psychic elements (sketched as 'substance') onto the practices and calculations, and institutional forms, which constitute the political system at issue. In question then is the engagement of the psyche in ideology, the relation of the psychic subject and the subject of ideology, and the conditioning overlay of psyche, discourse, and political practice which can be described as the tourniquet of suture working to align and move subjects, to forge 'the subject' out of the heterogeneous subjects it collects. This question opens the possibility of determinate analyses, indeed it can only be given its value there: in place of the nebulous conception that fascism could/couldn't happen here, with its appeal to a human essence, it's necessary to evaluate the possibility of a particular happening in a defined 'here', thus to specify certain opportunities and difficulties presented for that happening in terms of political practices and particularly, institutions, and their engagement of a subject which is itself historically specific.

Fascism further escapes theorisation by any ahistorical concept of authority as essential repression and as the possession and exercise of power by the 'dominant' against the 'dominated', by the way in which its power is diffused. Repression theories conceive a concentration of power in a limited class; the entire fascist population, however, is not only the object, but the support of authority, it is part of a network which is traversed in its whole extent by authority. Emblematic of this is the state's actual distribution of power to the ruled as part of the operation of ruling: Nazism confers increases in the judicial and administrative power of its subjects, in the form of power to betray and convict neighbours, to confiscate property of Jews, and so on. It is thus wrong to assume that authority and repression are only exercised by those

⁸ R Barthes, 'Pasolini's *Salo*: Sade to the Letter', in P Willemsen, (ed), *Pasolini*, BFI, London, 1977, p 65.

'with' power against those 'without', or that separation from power is a precondition of being the object of repressive authority. To be as subject is already to be subjected in a net of power relations, and it's these relations and the determinate discourses and practices in which they engage the subject, and *not* the possession of an abstract power-capacity, which condition the outcome of practices and struggles, their 'success'.

Fascism's implementation of polymorphous possibilities introduce further absurdities for the concept of power as a locally possessed and exercised capacity, in that its distribution of power involves changes which such a theory could only see as a lifting of repressions: particularly at issue here are the repressions traditionally maintained on the spoken word and on women. It's understood, of course, that there is a certain connection between the two – see for instance the comments on 'women's writing' and the voice assembled in Stephen Heath's article 'Difference'⁹ – though this is not to be pressed as a correspondence. For women, there is a movement within the power-economy of representation. For the spoken word, what shifts is not the final authority of the voice (which writing and the book borrow only on condition of acknowledging an ideal voice, presenting themselves as prosthetic speech), but the status within that authority of the *materiality* of the voice, whether the voice is taken in its 'grain'¹⁰ or in other representations. It is primarily in terms of their figuration in a politics of representation, then, that the 'connection' between women and the spoken word is postulated. In both Italy and Germany, the spoken word becomes the dominant medium and the authoritative political act, and, in the persons of the dictators, speech erupts – to turn together speech and woman – in a veritable hysteria of oratory. And who could fail to see, in the public appearance of Mussolini, with his body elaborately decorated with drapes and feathers, the marks of an oratorical 'femininity'?¹¹

The importance of women for fascist ideology catches them in a 'liberation' which is double-edged: freed for work, they labour under an economic exploitation; revered as Woman, they are clamped into familial and domestic interpellations: the bereaved

9 Stephen Heath, 'Difference', *Screen* v19 n3, Autumn 1978, pp 78-9. 'Women's writing' – why quotation marks? (which are not used in Heath's article). There is something problematically and productively 'unfinished' – in Brecht's sense – in the terms (women? writing?) which I'm reluctant to seem to close, which won't pass unmarked. Something 'sticks' there, a question: Chantal Akerman's ('Difference' p 101), of what cheats us all?

10 R Barthes, 'The Grain of the voice', in *Image-Music-Text*, London 1977.

11 See Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, 'Sexualité Feminine dans l'Ideologie Fasciste', *Tel Quel* n66, Summer 1976, pp 26-42. Translated in *Feminist Review*, n1, 1978.

22 of the First World War are condemned to repeat their experience by a discourse of death and mortality which runs through feminine sexuality – in the oratory of Mussolini, with its ‘cradles and coffins’ – and by the solidity of the family in ideology; ‘the smallest, but also the most important unit of the state structure’¹² the family also founds an analogous image of the state which allows the preservation of authoritative relationships at the same time as it crucially precludes the imaging of *class* struggle. The state is thus in an ambivalent position towards women: it supports them, but – as Brecht points out – as a pimp supports prostitutes; the women are sent out for gain, to bring in the men: ‘In politics, it is necessary to have the support of the women, because the men follow spontaneously’.¹³ An astute judgement: if Hitler is accorded ‘dictatorial powers . . . in recognition of your rare gift of oratory’ by the Nazi party¹⁴ he is maintained in that power not only by financial support from big capital, but also by loans raised on the hoards of valuables presented to him by infatuated women admirers. ‘In fact there is no better school for national-socialism than pimping’.¹⁵ And this is part of an eroticisation of power which is the very opposite of any ‘direct repression of sexuality’ – itself a fantasy.

The point of this discussion is not to suggest that fascism ‘really’ offers certain ‘freedoms’; rather, it aims to undermine the entire conceptualisation of power and authority as simple ‘repressions’ which have as their inverse the possibility of simple ‘liberty’. It is this fallacious conception which vitiates the theories of Reich and Althusser, and it stems from their conflation of ego and social subject. In consequence, for Reich, a possibility of energetic orgasmic liberation answers to the fact of repression; for Althusser, the possibility of ‘science’ (outside ideology) and the apparent possibility of a subject *prior* to interpellation oppose the work of the repressive apparatuses. Against these theories of duality, inside/outside, and one-way forces, must be posed a theory of historical economies of power (a structured dynamic of energies on the model of the libidinal economy) such that no element or strategy in isolation can be seen as universally and eternally ‘progressive’ in essence. There is no singular outburst of liberation as the opposite of repression, and no authority which can be done away with as such; the task of theory must therefore be to specify the political effects of various historical organisations and distributions of that authority.

12 A Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans R Manheim, London 1969.

13 A Hitler, cit Macciocchi, op cit, p 28.

14 Cited in Werner Maser, *Adolf Hitler*, London 1975, p 254.

15 B Brecht, cit Macciocchi, op cit, p 32.

If the previous section has demonstrated the impossibility of specifying 'authority' in terms of its repressive operation, this does not entail the denial of repression as such. The emphasis to be made here is rather that the proper site of repression is the individual who exists first and only thanks to the work of repression. This emphasis in turn draws attention to the fact that authority is constituted in that same movement of repressions and identifications, such that the existence of the individual and authority inevitably stand in mutual inseparability and demand to be assigned the *same* origin in any myth of ontogenesis. This proposition amounts to a restatement that authority cannot be opposed by any 'inverse'. It also gives the lie to both functionalist accounts of authority, and genealogies and teleologies of social power in which authority emerges 'after the fact', to act on ready-constituted individuals.

The precise account of the relationships between identifications and repressions and the emergence of authority in the form of the super-ego is to be found in Freud's cultural and metapsychological writings, notably *The Ego and the Id*;16 the following summary claims to do no more than resume the terms of that discussion. In classical theory, then, the super-ego is described as the heir of the Oedipus complex; it arises first as an ego-ideal to repress the desires of the Oedipus complex in which it is formed as a parental identification. In this way the obstacle to the satisfaction of Oedipal desire, the father, is taken into service for the repression of that desire, and the identification is constituted as *double*, containing both an injunction and a prohibition: 'You may not *be* the father/You must *be like* the father'. The redirection of libidinal cathexis onto an internalised identification and the fact that in this identification the child 'borrows' from the father the strength to repress prohibited desire, entails the separation and development of part of the ego as an ideal image and an agency, the super-ego, which retains the character attributed to the father. Itself repressed (how could such mechanisms operate *consciously*?) and thus working from the unconscious, the super-ego continues to scrutinise the psychic economy, to 'judge it critically and take it as its object';17 as the voice of conscience, guilt, 'higher feeling', the super-ego and its authoritative, normative prohibitions and ideals erect as law the renunciations, sublimations and transformations which characterise its origin; and its critical regulation of energetic expenditure thus prioritises those

16 S Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* vXIX, Page refs here to *International Psychoanalytic Library*, n12, Hogarth Press, London, 1974.

17 S Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, *Standard Edition* vXIV p 247. See also J Laplanche and J-B Pontalis, *The Language Of Psychoanalysis*, *International Psychoanalytic Library*, n4, Hogarth Press, London, 1973.

- 24 transformed or aim-inhibited activities which are designated 'cultural'.

All temporal explanation can be confounded by dreamers of origin: what is it which recognises itself as addressed by interpellation, what is it which makes the 'jubilant assumption' of its own image in the mirror? The advantage of Freud's model is that there is no identity in a moment 'before': the unco-ordinated operation of drives provides a principle of organisation sufficient to create an identity of which it 'does not previously partake. And this avoids the embarrassments of circularity to be found in mimetic models of 'internalisation', where the problem arises of specifying an authority capable of enforcing the acceptance of authority into an already constituted 'inside'. Unable to conceive that the individual is originally informed with authority, Reich, for example, works his account back to a problematic 'submission' at which point explanation must stop; it is impossible to account for this 'submissive act' of pre-existent people, by which they internalise 'the existing mechanisation of life. It serves the purpose of bringing about a *psychic* anchoring of a mechanised and authoritarian civilisation by way of making people lack self-confidence'.¹⁸

This assumption that society exists over and against (and *before*) the individuals which compose it, cannot avoid functionalism; for Reich, character, family and social structures are 'functionally identical' in shaping the individual for society's ends. What is problematic here is the impossibility of an external agency intervening in the psychic economy as only the internal, but differentiated, super-ego can; sublimation cannot be imposed. Authority must be seen, in effect, as the *fact* of repression and the individual, rather than as a term which stands externally in relation to them.

Reich is further misled by his 'sweeping primitivism' (Marcuse) which proposes an apparent voluntarist renunciation of the super-ego and misconceives a 'liberation' in which 'progress in freedom appears as a mere release in sexuality'.¹⁹ This is to overlook the actual close ties between the super-ego and the id: because of the way it is set up – as an ideal image to placate the id for its lost object of desire, to be itself an object attractive for the id's libido – the super-ego stands against the ego as the veritable representative of the id, negotiating its claims to satisfaction. Thus an attack on the super-ego – even were such psychic tampering possible – would not increase the satisfactions of the id; it would rather concentrate those satisfactions on the ego as object, thus reinscribing a vast primary narcissism.

If the Freudian account offers certain insights into the authoritarian constitution of society, it nevertheless raises a political

18 W Reich, *The Function Of The Orgasm*, New York, 1942, cit C Rycroft, Reich, Fontana, London, 1971, p 40.

19 H Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation*, London, 1969.

problem of a certain inertia – whether in its theorisation or in its object remains undecided – such that it is difficult to give any *historical* account of authority in its terms, or to specify any possibilities of change: authority appears endlessly self-perpetuating and circular, reproducing itself down infinite generations of dominant super-egos. Indeed this difficulty is already formalised within psychoanalytic theory: the super-ego 'perpetuates the existence of the factors to which it owes its origin.'²⁰ Moreover: since

'a child's super-ego is in fact constructed on the model not of its parents, but of its parents' super-ego, the contents which fill it are the same and it becomes the vehicle of tradition and of all the time-resisting judgements of value which have propagated themselves in this manner from generation to generation'.²¹

This historico-political inertia of psychoanalysis is compounded by its uselessness for a social critique. There is the constant temptation and difficulty of postulating and defending an individual/society homology: although the super-ego provides a conceptual way around this impasse, Freud himself, in the bizarre 'Moses And Monotheism', devotes time to elaboration of a genotype-phenotype link which is patently absurd: it entails the postulation of a social subject and overlooks the illegitimacy of conceiving society as an organism composed of a totalised set of harmonising individuals and maintaining at the *social* level concepts, attributes and activities which are properly those of the individual: what for example, could social sexual drive and activity consist of?

In addition, Freud's social critique – in *Civilisation and its Discontents*²² – threatens to lapse into a futile functionalism; realisation that the quest for happiness can neither be fulfilled nor abandoned does not persuade Freud to dismiss its problematic, or deter him from evaluating society as a regulated means with a certain aim. What need psychoanalysis for this? With the rudiments of a psychology and a political theory of the subject, Hobbes had conducted this very discussion almost three centuries previously. . . .

Political history and psychoanalysis thus fail to synthesise and this is the result of a certain historicity of psychoanalysis: what produces the 'illness' specified in its concepts is not the functioning, but rather the failure to function, of the authoritarian father. It is impossible to use concepts elaborated under the conditions of a particular culture to produce a *metahistorical* diagnosis of that culture; ie the authoritarian society is 'healthy' (in its own terms,

20 S Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, *Standard Edition* vXIX, p 25.

21 S Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, *Standard Edition* vXXII.

22 S Freud, Section III of *Civilisation and its Discontents*, *Standard Edition* vXXI.

26 which are the *only* terms there are) when it functions in an authoritarian way to produce submissive subjects. The problem can never be one of producing other terms (the dream of a 'science', a metahistory, a discourse 'outside'); rather, the work must be done within the discursive conjuncture offered, but aiming to exploit its contradictions, to catalyse certain possible practices: thus psychoanalysis and feminism, psychoanalysis and film, psychoanalysis and education, and so on.

The actual political question for psychoanalysis, then, does not immediately concern the 'eternities' of its metapsychology – though these eternities are a vexed question in themselves: against the view that they embody an unwarranted eternalisation of the bourgeois family and society, it is possible to maintain that the function of castration really is universal for any desire cut across by its impossibility²³ – though this must *open*, rather than close the question of the promotion of that function and its representation, the question of mother, father and child as *signifiers*, of the Oedipus and alternative modes of representation – that the authority of the super-ego is an inevitability of the identifications set up in the history of the subject. Even below the level of linguistic accounts of the Oedipus, it's possible to pose a biological ground for the super-ego, that 'most important characteristic of both the individual and the species',²⁴ in the long childhood helplessness resulting from the 'real specific prematurity of birth in man'.²⁵ The locus of the real problem is in the historical constraints imposed by representation: even speculation on other modes of organisation is inhibited by the solidity of the family, and its blocking of action is all but total. The reality of these constraints isn't to be voluntaristically avoided by the left: from the very beginning of socialist discourse, for example, the family is *theoretically* on the way out; but, as object of investment of all kinds, the family always provides the unit from which social *policy* of both right and left starts and at which it stops.

The real stakes in the politics of the family are never the *abolition* of the family, however: to believe *that* is to subscribe to another fantastic form of the family romance, that of the child without parents; what must be conceptualised are, rather, alternatives and their appropriate modes of transition. The family is not in question in its absolute existence, but in its existence as a particular regime of representation. What is crucial about the family site is its containment of multiplicity, the way it is crossed by various specifications of the subject and its history. articulation of the social subject on to the subject of language, but language is only ever encountered in particular discourses,

23 cf M Safouan, *Etudes sur l'Oedipe*, Paris, 1974.

24 S Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, op cit, p 25.

25 J Lacan, *Ecrits, A Selection*, London 1977, p 4.

and the first discourses which the child encounters are those of the family; at the same time, however, these discourses are inserted in various other social practices. Thus the family is a site of articulation of the social subject onto the subject of language, conditioning the possible interventions of the subject into other discourses and practices; it forms one of the crucial representational nodes in which the sexing of the subject, the reproduction of the social formation, and so on, are given in a historically coherent solidity, are instituted and institutionalised. The task for analysis is neither to treat in isolation the various sites within the family (the economic, psychoanalytic, etcetera), nor to encompass those sites in a singular concept (any attempt to 'combine' psychoanalysis and historical materialism could only be disastrous insofar as it would produce a meta-subject), but rather to isolate particular historical contradictions between the various workings, and thus to fracture the coherence of the family as the unifying instance, introducing the possibility of change into the solidity of the family.

To return: the profitable historical question then is never to the 'eternal' status of these eternities, to the fact of authority, but rather to the forms of that authority, the activation of Oedipal structuring in families, schools, and so on and the opportunities offered there; the point is – in Brechtian spirit – not to alter the very constitution of subjects, to 'elect a new people', but to exploit it.

For obvious historical reasons, both Freud and Reich were impressed by the human capacity for destruction; but where Freud postulated the *death drive*, Reich saw only the straightforward repression of sexuality. Freud is thus spared the fallacious dream of a sexual paradise, and is able to suggest the necessity of authoritarian phenomena in society: since society must moderate both classes of instinct, it inevitably produces sadistic and 'authoritarian' manifestations of the sublimated death drive. For Reich, these phenomena remain a kind of conspiratorial mystery, as do defence, 'character-armour', repression and man's turning against himself; the explanatory gestures he makes are towards the 'concrete facts' of an anthropological prehistory, and towards man's seeing himself as an object. This latter is near the mark; it is systematised by Freud, but in a way which makes it clear that hate and aggression have their specific origin and are not *inversions* of love: 'The true prototypes of the relation of hate are derived not from sexual life, but from the ego's struggle to preserve and maintain itself.'²⁶ The Oedipus complex which constitutes the subject is also intimately bound up with hate and aggression; it makes its first appearance in the 'Interpretation of

26 S Freud, *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, *Standard Edition* vXIV.

28 Dreams' under the heading 'Dreams of the Death of Persons of whom the Dreamer is Fond'.²⁷

Without the death drive, Reich's position is simplistic: 'Anti-social behaviour springs from secondary drives which owe their existence to the suppression of natural sexuality';²⁸ but so does *social* behaviour. Reich again overlooks the *satisfying* role of the super-ego, in that it redirects to cultural ends primarily those drives which have *already* failed to attach themselves to a sexual aim (and thus remained 'perverse');²⁹ more crucially, ignorance of the death drive allows him to overlook the fact that the inhibition of drives sustains civilisation as well as threatens it. And so he falls into a futile tautology: to do away with antisocial behaviour, do away with society. . . .

In this positivism, with no place for lack or death, Reich cannot fail to be normative and essentialist. Falling into the delirium of plenitude, he produces a Reich-norm which is the antithetical twin of the Schreber-norm. On the one side a mastery and a training, on the other an energetics of liberation; common to both, the fulness of the imaginary, its paranoia.

Between theories dreaming of a full individual subject, unmarked by lack or death, and of a consciously functional society, allocating to each subject its lot of pleasure and pain, neither of which can comprehend the *work* of authority (since work is transformation), what is needed is a theory of *einstellung*, the installation (creation/setting in place) of the social subject. This can be best provided by the theory of discourse and signification, practices which are authoritative for the subject without being in any sense manipulative of a subject already constituted elsewhere, practices which involve a subjection to language which is not expressive, but constitutive. Discourse must therefore, be acknowledged as immanent in the overall operation of power (without reducing *all* practice to discursive practice — a globalising tendency which is problematic in Foucault's work); forms of subjection sustain and are sustained upon concomitant forms of subjectivity, organised in language.

Working in (relative) harmony with the interests of production, discourse is theorised by Foucault as part of 'a set of material elements and techniques that serve as . . . supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate

27 S Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Standard Edition vvIV-V.
28 W Reich, quoted in Rycroft, *Reich* London 1971, p 40.

29 By which term no 'judgement' is implied: 'perverse' here simply designates that which falls outside the definition of sexuality which is current as 'normality' in a given historical regime of adaptation. Cf Freud's generally similar usage in the *Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality*, Standard Edition vVII.

them by turning them into objects of knowledge'.³⁰ In this subjection/subjectification, experience is authorised by the positions available in language, for example in pronouns; the observation that 'A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation'³¹ could be made precisely on the function of the pronoun 'I', which provides a place in language for the *sujet de l'énoncé* (the subject of the enounced) and attempts to cover over the split between the *sujet de l'énoncé* (the 'I' in language, the linguistic subject) and the *sujet de l'énonciation* (the producer of that utterance, the 'I' in the world, the psychoanalytic subject).³² What is at issue is the material effect of a fictitious place in producing an identity, perhaps most tellingly illustrated in its moments of deficiency: jokes, where the system of linguistic places collapses ('Is this the place where the Duke of Wellington spoke those words?' 'Yes, this is the place, but he never said the words . . .'), or paradoxes where the two subjects are caught in incompatible contradiction: 'I am lying . . .' In the imaginary language of dual, full identities, there is always the possibility of a paranoid relation to power, modulating the linguistic permutations until the fundamental aggression is turned back on its origin as though from the object, the impossibility of 'I love him' yielding the 'necessity' of 'He hates me'; the recognition of lack which allows access to the symbolic splits off the name from its bearer and allows relation to figures of authority.

The constant problem for discourses which specify this operation of authority is the difficulty of calculating their own effect on that operation – an effect which is inevitable, since a metadiscourse is impossible, and every discourse produced must modify the conjuncture to which it adds. Psychoanalysis, for example, re-authorises the father, the super-ego, and so on, by introducing them in a new way in a discourse authorised by the protocols of natural science. The realities of the discursive conjuncture thus entail the impossibility of *negating* a discourse, and for that reason,

30 M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, the Birth of the Prison*, London 1977, p 28.

31 M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p 202.

32 Against the objection that this formulation grants too great a stability to the *sujet de l'énoncé*, it can be argued that this subject is itself internally corroded: first, by the very fact of its division from the *sujet de l'énonciation*, and secondly, by the fact that every example of *parole*, in which it claims to be the instance of coherence, can be pulled into heterogeneity, either by reference to the disjunction of the subjects, or by demonstration of the various overlapping statements which the single instance of *parole* implicates. The main argument at this point is that the stability of any subject can be demonstrated to be the function of a construction, and while this demonstration is more difficult for the *sujet de l'énoncé*, it is not impossible. The difficulty is further eased by the fact that the *sujet de l'énoncé* is never encountered in isolation (which is precisely the pertinence of theorising the split, the 'fading subject', and so on).

30 it is an impossible strategy to *oppose* a discourse by producing another.³³ What clearer illustration of this than 'Moses and Monotheism'?³⁴ Written against religion, what it brings back is a postulation of an archaic heritage, a veritable 'collective unconscious', inclining to Jungian and even Hegelian conceptions; written against the individualist-authoritarian constellation of its historical situation, which reinforces the preoccupations of its subject matter, what returns in the writing is an overtly first-person style and an appeal to a veritable monotheism of scientific authority, strategies which *redouble* rather than oppose the authoritarianism of their object.

Given the impossibility of opposition, psychoanalytic theory can become politically operable only by questioning or subverting the discourses of dominant knowledge, especially in its relations with medicine and linguistics. The body as subjected to the needs of production is the body as specified by medical science, and it is this same body which is left out of account by linguistics; psychoanalysis offers a productive potential in conceptualising *another* body, the imaginary body of a subject 'made of language'. In its operability, psychoanalysis has to be the bearer of an asymmetry, not another competitor for knowledge-mastery; more important, it has to be politically principled, and this from *outside*, since no degree of elaboration of its concepts will find in them the elements of a politicised social- or self-critique. What will be found, however, are the contradictions to which a politics must respond, from which it can profit.

3 Education and the Institution

'There are three impossible tasks: to educate, to cure, to govern.'
(Freud)³⁵

The impossibility is that of specifying an *aim* or a *content* for these activities, the impossibility of an *end*. It is not removed by their localisation in institutions, apparently circumscribed in time and space, for the institution has an end which is itself endless and which, above all, it must fulfil *silently*: to reproduce itself and to reproduce the mode of production. In this work it has the 'relative

33 This isn't of course to deny *effectivity*, the possibility of displacing and replacing discourses. cf, for example, the struggle by which seventeenth-century political philosophy gradually emancipated itself from the arena of Biblical controversy, developing its own grounds and terms of argument. Or, more topical, compare the effects of the discourses of the (still lingering) 'death of the author' on the practices of criticism, and particularly on institutional education.

34 S Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, *Standard Edition* vXXIII.

35 S Freud, Preface to August Aichhorn, *Verwahrloste Jugend*, Vienna 1925 (translated as *Wayward Youth*, New York 1935, London 1936). Preface translated as 'Psychoanalysis and Delinquency' in 'Four Prefaces' in S Freud, *Collected Papers* v5, London 1950, pp 98-100.

autonomy' of ideology, but the guarantee of its silence on its own operation is provided by an appearance of total autonomy. Here again is the impossibility: educational 'experiments' which fail to reproduce the mode of production are seen to fail not politically, but to fail *absolutely* within their own closed 'autonomy', to fail educationally. This means: the impossibility of political terms for education; no terms for education except the 'educational'; the impossibility of definition, reflexive knowledge and critique of education.

The way around this impossibility involves questioning education not in its 'nature', but in its effects, not in its own terms, (precisely, there are none), but in those of political analysis of practice; and this involves a primary definition of education in terms of the institution, as a system of practices, including the discursive. Recent overemphasis of discursive practice has tended to take the definition of institutions to a new, somewhat etherial extreme, against which it is now necessary to reassert the fact that institutions provide a materialisation of ideologies (without falling into the idealism of positing thought as a 'cause'). There is thus no need to apologise for a certain literalness in the treatment of institutions: they provide a *text* of power, certainly, but also an operative architecture and a physical discipline of authority.

The relation between education and the authoritative practices of the institution is of extremely long standing, such that the discursive practices of education appear (relatively) stable in their ideology; that shift of the episteme, the major concern of Foucault's work, which involves the emergence of the 'human sciences' and the fabrication of a whole population – rather than a limited aristocracy – of individuals, corresponds not so much to a change in educational practice as to its demographic diffusion. It is difficult to conceive a 'birth of the school'; education has long been linked with the individual subject; thus the Rasphuis of Amsterdam, which Foucault cites as a transitional institution (1596) marking the rise of the individual in penalty, can base its practice on the principles of an already long-established educational practice of 'a pedagogical and spiritual transformation of individuals brought about by continuous exercise'.³⁶

There cannot be any serious doubt about the regulative and authoritarian nature of any practice which can found a prison system; suffice it here to remark the connection between this practice and the super-ego. 'Discipline is a political anatomy of detail'; and that detail, which characterises a whole tradition of scholastic pedagogy, is the material for 'the attentive "malevolence" that turns everything to account'.³⁷ Education; detail; super-ego; discipline: the practices unfold, but what is at issue

36 M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, op cit, p 121.

37 M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p 139.

32 is more than a succession; education continues and sustains those moments of the formation of the super-ego which are never 'over and done with'. Post-Freudian theory (Klein, Glover, Spitz) has worked to diffuse the formation of the super-ego from the Oedipal moment, and in this respect the super-ego components theorised by René Spitz (as actual primordia of the super-ego: see 'On the Genesis of Super-ego Components')³⁸ are particularly relevant to educational practice: they consist of imposed physical actions, the attempt at mastery of gestures by means of identification, and identification with the aggressor.

In what follows, the emphasis is on the school rather than the university: why is this, when it appears at first sight that the university is more obviously 'an institution'? The answer lies in that very obviousness: because it appears as the margin and extreme of a continuous graded process, the university – like nursery education at the other 'end' of the process – is constantly in question, under debate in its very existence. Again like nursery school, university is felt to be extraneous to the 'natural' duration of education, (witness the labels 'pre-school' and 'further' education); it trespasses on adulthood as the nursery does on infancy, and prolongs the student's 'apprenticeship' beyond any possibility of biological pseudo-justification: while school maintains a degree of plausibility in proposing itself as the time of 'adolescence', forcing an artificial gap between puberty and adulthood, the university – despite tendencies to assert 'student' as a special category of 'child' – cannot dissemble its keeping subjects from 'productive' work; further, the university conspicuously costs money in its operation. In terms of the ideological economy, then, university can appear as superfluous, as precisely a waste; in response, it is constantly forced to produce discourses of justification of its existence, be they 'economic' or 'cultural'. School, on the other hand, is never challenged in its very existence; it produces debate, but never justification, since at bottom it is 'natural'. And 'everybody knows' what school is for, even if nobody can quite say; which is to say that school is excused the impossible task of having to reflect explicitly on its own rationale. School is thus an object of knowledge which is more vulnerably ideological, easier to 'shock' in political analysis.

The shift of attention after 1968 from the university cannot entirely be accounted for, however, by claiming that the school offers a more productive site for radical interventions in educational theory and practice. The university has implemented successful reformist strategies which produce boredom and lack of direction in place of violent rebellion; it has successfully *functionalised* itself (in a way which school, incapable of reflecting on the

38 R Spitz, 'On the Genesis of Super-ego Components', *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* vXIII 1958, pp 375-404.

political ends it serves, can never do) to produce intellectualised labour for the technological and administrative needs of modern capitalism. Most important, the university has overtly 'depoliticised' its practice, which amounts to making a political choice for the *status quo*. Called upon to conduct a debate on the capitalist system in crisis, and to offer a theoretical apology for that system which sustains it, the university was forced to question capitalism and to bring various alternatives into the theoretical arena; the effect of this, however, is rather an inoculation than an infection; in the process of debate, the university consolidated its ability to 'academicise', and also took up pluralism as a *principle* of its operation, with the result that there is no discourse which it cannot admit with impunity. The paralysis of university politics, and a certain pessimism among intellectuals, are not without justification . . .

The worst of this despair can be avoided, however: without lapsing into a pietism of the proletariat, watching and praying, waiting on the day of revolution, it is important to remember that the revolution will not be made once for all in the university (it will not be *made*, in that sense, anywhere at all). The lesson of Brecht's involvement with the institutional theatre is that all strategies must be contingent; its warning – witness the modern theatre's rehabilitation of those strategies, their institutionalisation as a veritable genre, 'Brechtianism' – is that they can only be temporary.

In what follows, a first section sketches some of the psychological determinants at work on school's operation as an authoritarian institution; the second section looks briefly at the possibility of psychoanalytic intervention in the politics of institutionalised pedagogy.

Despite its interest in the child, psychoanalysis has produced little literature on the school (but see the collection *Pédagogie: Education ou Mise en Condition?*³⁹); Erikson's *Childhood and Society*,⁴⁰ for example, is virtually silent on the apparatus which mediates between its two terms; while positing a correspondence between the development of the child and the institutions of society, it allows this to remain at the level of a homology, and offers no causal account of school's role in constituting the identity of the infant. This unmediated polarity is general: the behaviourist psychology, unchallenged in its domination of educational theory by a psychoanalytic practice which has been directed towards the institutionalised psychotherapy of the 'abnormal' and

39 Partisans, *Pédagogie: Education ou Mise en Condition?*, Maspero, Paris 1974.

40 E Erikson, *Kindheit und Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart, 1961; trans, *Childhood and Society*, Paladin, London, 1977.

- 34 'deviant' child, speaks without embarrassment of 'internal' and 'external' factors and 'influences'; but although it has neglected the 'everyday' functioning of education, psychoanalysis nevertheless offers an understanding of the relationship between subject and system, of school as a system of places which are constitutive for the individuals which occupy them.

What is crucial about the taking-up of a position in school – for teacher as well as child – is that it affects the probability of satisfaction of drive; the libidinal relations of the family are replaced in school by sublimated relationships in a renunciation of familiarity which has the character of being enforced and determined by the nature of school as institution. School mobilises aggression against all tendencies to familiarity, and this is demonstrated rather than contradicted by the progressive abandonment of corporal punishment, which offers a certain libidinal satisfaction in all cases. The movement then, is towards a dominance of rationality and speech: of dialogue, whose disavowal of aggression Lacan has shown to be precisely mendacious; and of the voice, prime medium of authority and the super-ego, the mode of signification most distant from the body and libido. In this 'progressive mastery' of a rationality of the super-ego can be read a degree of return to the extreme practices of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; in the following account of their use of the 'signal', a wooden sounding apparatus, the terms are precisely those of voice, super-ego, and authoritarian interpellation:

'Whenever a good pupil hears the noise of the signal he will imagine that he is hearing the voice of the teacher or rather the voice of God himself calling him by his name. He will then partake of the feelings of the young Samuel, saying with him in the depths of his soul: "Lord, I am here".'⁴¹

The attempted renunciation of libidinal contact is not without reason. In presenting another organisation, a reminder of polymorphous perversity, the child inevitably compromises the adult's stability of organisational control over its drives, always confronting it with a situation of temptation, which provokes 'corrective' or repressive responses towards child sexuality. And since the Oedipus complex is never 'finally' resolved, never over and done with even for the adult, the encounter with the child's desire effects a restructuration, reactivating those processes which were involved in the adult's own relationship to its parents. The adult expects the child's relationship to it to be the same as its own childhood relations to adults, such as it has developed and preserved a (fantastic) image of those adults and relations; and because the teacher's super-ego is formed after the model of the parental super-ego, the action exercised under its promoting by

41 Cited by M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* op cit, p 166.

the teacher is that exercised on the teacher by his own parents. Within the dual relation of the pedagogic situation, this action is doubled, contained twice over: the teacher confronts *two* children, the one it must teach, and the one within; there is nothing to do but treat the first as the second, and thus the teacher repeats the outcome of its own Oedipus complex on the person of the child.⁴²

Informing not only classroom practice, the overt ahistoricism which is supported on this repetition extends also to the content of courses – witness the impression given by school textbooks that they explain to the pupil its relationship to ‘Man’, and align the student with that essence – and especially to the training of teachers. In anticipating the facts of the classroom, the trainee teacher is forced to rely primarily on the experiences of his or her own childhood, while at the same time identifying with images of the teacher – however infantile or touched by fantasy – preserved from that time; the trainee’s first installation in the place of educator is thus entirely imaginary and fantastic.

For the child, the first contact with school involves a discipline, the imposition of forms and models of behaviour which exact the conformity on which school’s work depends; that imposition, however, takes place in and through an interpersonal relationship with the teacher. Hence the ambivalence of school: it’s a *formal* institution, but that formality is structured in behaviour which is itself actually *informal* (contrast this interlacing with the situation in work institutions, where there is a clear separation of formal from informal, and a relative unimportance of informal behaviour for the functioning of the institution.) This reincursion of the informal and personal entails that no full ‘scientific’ training of teachers can ever be adequate.⁴³

A further repetition is engendered by the fact that the teacher confronts not only children, but also ‘the authorities’, a confrontation which again reactivates the Oedipus, which in turn decides the proportion of ‘personal’ to ‘professional’ elements in the relationship. In this psychic readjustment, what distinguishes the teacher from any other functionary is that the teacher hasn’t been seriously prepared to envisage the *administrative* aspects of the professional role, and, least of all, encouraged to study the rational foundations of this administration. Thus the educational apparatus, instituted ‘from before’ and ‘from above’, is preserved in a kind of natural mystique. As an anecdotal example: in its one-year postgraduate course, London University’s Institute of Education is said to devote the whole of *one hour* to teaching ‘Philosophy and

42 Cf Siegfried Bernfeld, *Sisyph oder die Grenzen der Erziehung*, Vienna, 1931, p 147.

43 cf Peter Furstenau, ‘Contribution à la Psychanalyse de l’Ecole en tant qu’Institution, *Pédagogie*, p 60.

- 36 Psychology of Education and Sociology of Knowledge'; and this eloquent hour contains the 'truth' which says it all: 'Knowledge is classless'. A similar rationale underlies the resistance to group work; while it escapes the persecutory anxiety which attends all dual situations, it's opposed on grounds of technical difficulty and precisely because it 'makes the educator question the place he occupies in a hierarchy founded on authority.'⁴⁴

Since school cannot conform itself to an assigned *aim*, the teacher is left a certain space of personal judgement, a 'freedom' which amounts to a lack of definition (and thus differs from the closely circumscribed 'liberty' of the university teacher). In the operation of this freedom, however, the teacher is not protected from the aggression of parents whom it may offend; the teacher is also exposed to the authorities in so far as judgement, unable to establish itself as measured evaluation, becomes personal appreciation. This multiple personalism of authority in school inevitably implicates fantasies of power and persecution.

On the authority of diverse representations, institutions, one age-group against another, and finally the state, school maintains a 'special artificial milieu'⁴⁵ which is divided up precisely according to the disciplinary distribution of individuals in space, involving enclosure, partitioning, functional sites, and rank; time is divided up, for exhaustive use, by the timetable; progress is measured by the disciplinary instrument *par excellence*, the examination. After the introduction of serial space and simultaneous time, those features of class work which mark the technological revolution of education, school becomes an efficient learning and supervising machine, maintaining a maximal collective dependence. Organised on a plan, this system of constrained and collective tutelage requires of its courses a ritualisation of subject-matter (especially clear in 'physical education', a discipline of the body removed from normal exercise into a course, a 'training', play become game).⁴⁶ What is at issue in this imposition of ritual is both an anxiety and a process of defence, in the service of the ego, against the eruption of desire.

The ritualised apprenticeship of school, constructed as a detour around the drives, is able to subdivide the content of an understanding of the world, and, further, to teach the relations between these subdivisions as another set of contents, so that the whole can be assimilated outside any experience of that whole in its violence, obscurity of affective impact. This enfeeblement of affect, supported in its reactionary disposition by the principle of pluralism, allows a total autonomisation of courses, to the extent that

44 Maud Mannoni, 'An Experiment in a Special School', in *The Child, his Illness, and the Others*, Harmondsworth, 1973, p 236.

45 P Furstenau, 'Contribution', *op cit*, p 69.

46 cf D W Winnicott, 'Play and Reality', London 1978.

various 'conceptions of the world' can be taught: scientific, historical, artistic, religious, etc. This method evades the operability of knowledge in two related ways: first, by numbing any appreciation of *contradiction*, and its importance for analysis; and second, in that its 'elementary' rather than exemplary or analogical procedure of education detaches the time of school experience from that of adult experience. School is thus established apart from the world, as a machine capable of rendering it all down as educational subject-matter.

The real point of this procedure can be illustrated from the difficulties of political education, or rather, precisely the *ease* with which school handles a 'political education' which it ought to find impossible. In the process of insertion into the course system, political phenomena decompose into a number of apparently apolitical elements (historical, civil, juridical, economic, social, cultural – the ingenuity of the system is indefatigable) amenable to various academic disciplines, assimilable in infinite school projects. The terrible beauty of this system is that it combines endless 'productivity' with absolute safety: any number of interdisciplinary permutations can be generated without *ever* (even taken all at once) reassembling the dismembered political object in its politicality.

In their common destiny in the school, the political and the sexual are linked by a manifest affinity: their fields of tension outrun the limits set by education into, on the one hand, affective and irrational violence, and on the other, solidarity of calculated interests and rational initiatives. In addition, the school's structure does not authorise the teacher to *explain* its politics (or even to recognise them) and in fact, since the teacher's own authority is exercised in a psychic play of reactivated complexes, it entails that any discussion of those politics will be attended by anxiety. Foreclusion and defence, disavowal and inhibition: the school seals itself against politics.

No such sealing into an identity is ever possible, however, and in school the return of the repressed takes place in those very ceremonies and rituals which are erected as a defence against the recognition of power. Ritualisation favours the satisfaction of a certain type of aggression, and the pedagogic ritual itself – embracing 'pedantry' and the establishment of order – can easily offer itself as a tool of domination and a gratification of power. The totality of school practice can form a rationalising dissimulation of aggression; alternatively, the teacher threatened by the authoritarian structure of school may be tempted into an exercise of power which is at first misconceived as an affirmation of the self: '*Power* is a magical term, which permits treating the institution as an all-powerful entity.'⁴⁷ Such a teacher falls into the

47 E Roudinesco, *Pour une Politique de la Psychanalyse*, op cit, p 119.

38 magical delirium of institutionalised omnipotence, acted out in total identification with school's 'roles', total absorption in its ritual: the repressed drives thus triumph in the very defences set up against them.

School forms one instance in a social series of modifications of the subject which are without end; as an institution, it is marked by a contradiction of dispositions – to 'develop' to 'repress' – which are subsumed under an ideology of *adaptation*. This ideology is necessarily based on a *social apriori*: the 'intelligence' it inculcates cannot be understood without reference to a sociality, a consensus by which to evaluate initiatives; 'intelligence', the quantitative measurement of education, is as deeply implicated in social determinations as is 'humanity', the essential quality of man which education furnishes.

Given the existence – recognised or not – of the social *apriori*, the question arises for education of whether the critique of the school system should be pursued to the level of a critique of institutions in the social system, or, instead, appeal should be made to the moral judgement of the individual, proposing organisational reforms within the structure. Obviously unable to embrace the first alternative, pedagogic ideology entertains illusions of the second. Pedagogy is, however, incapable of any realistic estimation of its own practice or of the value – the futility – of such reforms; it avoids confronting the underlying contradiction, namely that there are *functional* tendencies at work in school (even though these fall short of the fullness of an assigned *aim*) which actually conflict with the educative ideal proclaimed by society (even though – or precisely because – that ideal is characterised in turn by the fact that no content can be specified for it). This can again be illustrated from political education: functionally conceived as the arrival at a moral consensus, it is at the same time ideally seen as a free manifestation of 'democracy in action', a liberty of thought.

In effect, this democracy reduces itself to a freedom to agree; a whole battery of ideological effects, notably the dominant institutionalisation of the 'norm' and the disciplinary marking of 'deviants' exist as guarantors of this 'consensus' even in its essential incompleteness, as gentle constraints funnelling into the 'natural'. As an establishment, school leaves for the pupil only one function, that of conformity (and thus support for exploitation); for pupil no less than teacher, the order of life appears an already instituted given.

The possibility of activity guided by political interests and attitudes – other than the avowedly 'apolitical' – is blocked by the lack of a minimal space of different forms of order; indeed in its pressure of organisational rituals, its manoeuvres of defence and exorcism, school renders problematic any concept of individual or educative 'intention'. A possible space of intervention is at present

provided by the open-plan schools, with concomitant 'vertical grouping' of classes, which are being produced by the system solely as a matter of financial expedience. The charge constantly made against these schools is that they 'don't work', and in a sense that is precisely right: they don't work to reproduce the disciplinary distribution of individuals in space, time and rank, and they do not work with (or for) the teachers and concepts produced by that system for its own repetitive reproduction.⁴⁸ The current 'great debate' is in part the squealing of a 'relatively autonomous' ideological instance outrun and over-ruled by its economic determinants.

Apart from this area of contradiction, pupil lack of interest is a 'realistic' response to an established order which leaves nothing to be done except to 'fit in'. However, the contradictions of this order – and also its coherence, its very rationale – are manifested in its 'problems of discipline': contradiction, in that unlike the adaptive school process in general, discipline aims not at changing and reclaiming individuals, but at marking and dividing them; coherence and rationality, in that, in its divisive scrutiny, its fabrication of an imaginary population of 'others', the disciplinary operation is in step with the whole pedagogic exercise, repetitive and evaluative, by which the school as institution designs a veritable semiotic of 'normality'.

The child's 'motivation' is to be exploited for 'adaptation'; play is to be divided from work in an education which is 'preparation' for the adult world where time is money, and waste is proscribed. This is the groundplan of pedagogy; its terms are conspicuously those of *demand*. In their operation, various apparatuses – the family of course, and above all the school – work to subject the *desire to know* to a particular organisation of power, to reduce that desire by imposing on it the terms of educative demand of the pedagogic enterprise. What is at stake is thus a historically-determined 'manageability', a utilitarian tutelage, the rule of knowledge-mastery.

Pedagogy is impossible, however (a fact which causes it no qualms) precisely in so far as it takes the child as an object of knowledge and not the place of a desire, in so far as it 'masters' the child, putting knowledge in the place of truth and refusing to recognise lack or desire, without which the stimulus-response model reigns supreme. This is necessarily psychologistic and

48 It's pertinent to ask, then, in what sense these schools do work: because where they work, they must exploit the heterogeneity of the social formation, engaging the contradictions which offer the space of alternatives. Analysis of these schools may, therefore, provide specifications of arenas of advance and transition, of practical political objectives.

40 behaviourist, and finds that educational practice which makes of the child the place of an assigned experience, and school a place of 'roles'. What this conception overlooks is that there is no separability of identities such that child and experience, child and role, can be divorced and thought in isolation; what the child identifies with is not a 'role', but elements of the real become signifiers, and this activity in signification is always structuring for the child, constitutive of it. In the same way, the child receives a language which is structuring for it, but cannot be said to *learn* that language, and this recognition displaces a certain fruitless psycholinguistic debate: there's *neither* innatism, nor acquisition, nor knowledge as such, nor imitation, since there is no subject apart from or prior to the subject of language. The displaced terms are those of a psychology, and mark the experience of linguists who dispute a psychologically-conceived 'child', while avoiding the place of the unconscious by reducing it to a structure determined in the convolutions of thinking. As soon as linguistics is enticed from the field of its own specific concept by its collusion with psychology and sociology, it oscillates between a logical cartesianism (itself split between generative and structural semantics: the locutor as irreducible remainder of language, the place of a structure which founds the utterance; of the structure as productive of the locutor in a set of subjective effects which subtend the utterance) and a sociologism which makes the locutor a centre, an essence under the alias of a temporality. Where psychoanalysis can intervene in this dominant knowledge is to assert the subject made of language, and to demonstrate that the locutor – 'ideal' or 'concrete' – of linguistics is always *imaginary*, marked by fantasies of identity. In contrast, acceptance of lack admits access to the symbolic, and an understanding of authority in the non-coincidence of object and name.

If the intervention of psychoanalysis takes place relatively easily in those discourses which organise knowledge, it is far more problematic in the institutional practices where that knowledge is operated. Part of the illustration of this can be taken from the particularly well-documented case of a 'special school' run by Maud Mannoni at Bonneuil-sur-Marne.⁴⁹ As a medico-pedagogic institution (IMP), the school at Bonneuil was actually responsible not to the ministry of education, but to that of health, thus all the more clearly inscribed within an account of norm and divergence to which psychoanalysis is fundamentally opposed. The importance of the norm is that it is able to run across an entire population, examining and taking account of every individual, even those it marks as deviant; its virtue is in the turning-together

49 See M Mannoni, *Education Impossible*, Seuil, Paris, 1973; M Mannoni, *Un Lieu Pour Vivre*, Seuil, Paris, 1976; and E Roudinesco, *op cit*, pp 117-156.

of individual and social evaluations, to which end it must be – 41
like the language theorised by Renée Balibar – at once universal
and divisive.

The institutionalisation of the divergent, as specified from the normative knowledges of medicine and psychology, entails that psychoanalytic practice within the institution can go ahead only under conditions of 'compromise' which could not stop short of annihilation of the yielding element. In institutions dominated by 'adaptation', but unable to reflect on their political aims and *aprioris*, 'mental health' is to psychiatric medicine what 'education' is to the school; psychoanalysis can only demonstrate the impossibility of these terms, and produce a disordering of the concepts which would demand an explicitly political re-articulation. Nevertheless, such analytic practice as there is does take place in a body of institutions, dominated by pedagogy and health, which appear to provide a retrospective *raison d'être* for psychoanalysis, constructing it as tributary to an ideology of demand which it actually undermines; where institutions function on the level of demand, analysis ignores the demand to let the desire speak, and in this aspect of its practice it is particularly unresponsive to demands for 'success', be it in guardianship, education or cure. The change (or negation) which institutionalisation produces in psychoanalysis can be illustrated from America, where the successful technologisation of the analytic 'plague' has produced 'the American way of happiness', the satisfaction by analytic practice of precisely these demands.

The dedication of psychoanalysis to the impossibility of the institutional practice of education entails in turn the impossibility of a psychoanalytic theory of pedagogy; while psychoanalysis can give an account of what goes on, and can furnish the instruments of a critique, it is unable to offer proposals for the direction of education because such proposals would have to curtail the endless nature of education, assigning it instead a content and an aim in conformity with a political end. In their specificity, however, the concepts of psychoanalysis are not already given in a determinate historical politicality; psychoanalysis cannot escape or replace political practice, but neither can it authorise itself from current political practice in institutions without serious compromises, which amount to damaging reductions in the effectivity of those concepts.

The effect of this disjunction is to reduce all psycho-political intervention to the level of local and temporary expedient tactics; while Bonneuil exists, 'its *raison d'être* is to be provisional'.⁵⁰ It also allows the continued dominance of behaviourist theory in education, and while the pedagogy based on this theory can be

50 E Roudinesco, *op cit*, p 126.

42 defended as 'realistic' (ie it 'works', visibly producing its calculated adaptive effects), it is also overtly authoritative, a pedagogy of the master: indeed, it has been demonstrated that the master's choice of stance as representative of society determines the reception of the lesson above all considerations of content (thus, the *same* lesson on communism was received as 'pro' or 'anti' by various classes differently addressed).⁵¹ No content can finally read itself; meaning is *always* at hazard across the subject — but not therefore a matter of chance. This does not deter this practice from presenting itself as objective, in all senses a pedagogy of *laws*.

The tradition of Newtonian determinism and its associated sensualism, which founds this pedagogy derived from Locke, Pestalozzi, Montessori and Herbart, also supports the psychology of stimulus-response, abandoning speculation in favour of scientific objectivism, and introducing behaviour as the prime object of study. The movement culminates in Pavlov's conditioned reflex theory, Watson's behaviourism and Thorndike's 'connectionism': Thorndike's law of effect has it that connections establish themselves in proportion to the degree in which they are effective, that is, the degree to which they realise the adaptation of the individual to the conditions of its action, thus emphasising not the adaptation itself, but rather the quantity of adaptability, the ever-present possibility of alteration.

In the programmes constructed after these theories, the 'abstract' is replaced by the 'concrete', the 'logical' by the psychological: a kind of 'reasonable aesthetic' of pedagogy is introduced. This represents the definitive abandonment of the realism of Aristotle and Aquinas, where rationalism conducted to the synthesis of essential and eternal form — a theory which allowed Aristotle's well known proposition that any two men, setting out to study politics under whatever different conditions, would inevitably come to the same conclusions, and which justified a 'directive' pedagogy, organising the disengagement of that form which was already known to be the 'truth'. Against this, behaviourism was led to appeal to 'real' experience and to the needs and preoccupations of the child; here, the need to take account of individual differences entailed a sophistication of the stimulus-response model: Thorndike and his successors demonstrated that response could only be considered in relation to the *couple* 'stimulus + individual', thus opening the way to 'situationism' in which all three terms are in mutual interaction to determine the final meaning and effect of experience. And this sophistication also marks the point at which the human *person*, in an ineluctable unity, irrupts into the classroom and the discourses of pedagogy,

⁵¹ See Arnold Clause, 'Les Problèmes Pédagogiques Aujourd'hui', *Pédagogie*, p 25.

becoming for the first time a major pre-occupation of modern education. 43

It is precisely that person, that unicity, which is problematic for psychoanalysis, however. That unitary person can only be the subject as interpellated by ideology, the subject sutured and restored from the division which is its being in desire, and become a whole, authorised, named subject. The analytic intervention, by refusing to attend to the demand of this subject, returns the subject of desire in its division, undoing a work by which 'the subject of desire, principle locus of an analytic non-response, is, in ideology, subject to imaginary constructions, "double agent", pseudonym'.⁵² In its very neutrality, psychoanalytic intervention excludes apoliticality (or rather, the availability of 'apoliticality' as a political option), because it cannot but operate a practice of the psyche, cannot avoid returning this other subject. The symbolic identity of the subject is to be found in the practice of decentrement which operates the contradiction between imaginary identities, the 'lost' identity and the identity 'conferred' in ideology. It is because it recognises and exploits this contradiction that psychoanalysis is unable to take up a position 'on the side of' the institution and its identities, and this in spite of the fact that psychoanalytic practice has the institution as a condition of its existence, that it is incorporated into the circulation of demand. To put it another way, it is because of this that psychoanalysis is so severely damaged, rendered routine and treatable, by its enforced institutionalisation. And finally it is because of this, the mutual impossibility of psychoanalysis and the 'normal' institution, coupled with the failure to politicise psychoanalysis, that such difficulties attend the psychoanalytic critique – in theory or practice – of the authority at work in the knowledge-power structures of education and institutions.

4 Power, Authority, Politics

Image and identity, 'place' and position: the consideration of power is thus ceaselessly returning into questions of the subject of representation; but crucially, there is a remainder at the centre of this consideration, the hub of that return, which demands explicit posing of those questions for power itself, in its own operation: what are the representational effects and subjections of power in the subjects and relationships it structures?

The importance of this question is that it forces the conceptualisation of power beyond a specious immediacy, counterpart of that folly which would 'know' the unconscious. Certainly there is such an immediacy of power, no less than there is the unconscious, but in its diadic structure of demand and the imaginary, this immediacy of power is paranoid, silent, *mute*; 'raw' and

52 E Roudinesco, *op cit*, p 130.

44 above all 'lawless', this diadic power is neither authoritative nor authorised and thus, incapable of undertaking its own self-legitimising symbolisation, it is unable to found a socially operable semiotics of power: the immediate dyad:

'... is a relation that not only renders the dimension of the spectacle useless: it excludes it. The agent of punishment must exercise a *total power which no third party can disturb*; the individual to be corrected must be *entirely enveloped* in the power that is being exercised over him. *Secrecy* is imperative, and so too is *autonomy*. *There is a discontinuity [of punitive power] in relation to the legal power*. These two consequences... are unacceptable for a theory and policy of penalty that has two aims in view: to get all citizens to participate in the punishment of the social enemy and to render the exercise of the power to punish entirely *adequate and transparent to the laws* that publicly define it'.⁵³

The need, then, is for a symbolisation of power; the instance in which power is figured, in which it enters on the symbolic, can be conceptualised as *authority*. Authority thus comes into being when power enters on language, discourse and signification, providing the present/absent third term which breaks the possibility of dual identity and which underpins signification by its introduction of difference. As power is embarking on its utilitarian symbolisation – and it is not entirely fanciful to historicise this, cautiously contemporary with the 'birth of the subject' in ideology – authority is set up as a figuration in the way the Father and the super-ego are set up: symbolisation and law replace the imaginary plenitude of demand, which is always (mis)taken as fully open to satisfaction by its object, when desire is forced to take its circuit through the other, the place of the third term, when the father is split off from the Name as a result of the Father's failure to fulfil the assumed promise to be the cause of his own desire. Thus, authority is figured out of the diadic immediacy of power as the third term, the mythic attribution of cause, as the Law, the Father, the super-ego are figured. A correspondence, but more: Authority is figured precisely as the Law, the Father, the super-ego.

The circuit of power in symbolisation thus takes place through the figure of authority as the third term which apparently founds it, but is in fact one of its effects. For power itself, no less than for the subject, there is a constant question of tying up authoritative representations; for power, it is a matter of aligning itself with the authorising image of a law which in fact cannot account for the operation of that power. The attributions of cause, the authoritative images, are thus in a sense always mythic, fictive. Authority supports identification (in both senses), it is the Father

53 M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* op cit, p 129 (my emphases).

and the super-ego; but if, in this, authority is the symbolic figure of power (as paranoid domination is its imaginary form), that figure is also a fiction, a representational construct and a function of discourse, and entails no real disposal of power: power structures authority, rather than vice-versa, which is why 'authority' is incapable of effectively aim-directed use of power, of voluntaristic modifications of the structure. Power is simply not available as a quality for use, it does not correspond in fact to its mythic localisation at points of authority.⁵⁴

Authority is thus vulnerable and sporadically precarious, being insufficient as a rationale for the operation of power in its representations. A host of specialist knowledges and discourses – precisely 'authorities on' criminology, medicine and pathology, psychology, linguistics, education, philosophy of all kinds, and so on – are set to work to buttress authority at those nodal points of discourse and practice where the subject is fabricated for power. To an extent, certainly, power does act on 'body and soul', but even 'body and soul' are first of all concepts, requiring elaboration in presentation before they become workable for power; and this elaboration is not always smoothly conducted by authority. As a very particular example of the incoherence of law called upon to justify the subjectification demanded by power, consider the crime of 'loitering with intent': in the implication of both physical presence and mental state, both body and mind have to be proved positively guilty, but that guilt can never be simply 'evident'; thus the conduct of evidence which can convict both body and mind must undertake to reduce them to a single level in the fabrication of the guilty subject, and in the difficulty of this it becomes circular: mental 'intent' is predicated on character defined in relation to a circumstantial history, while the circumstances of physical 'loitering' which constitute the offence are themselves precisely subject to construction in relation to what is 'known' of the character. The circle tightens further with the concession that no substantial length of time need

⁵⁴ This is to say that the effect of a practice is not to be conceptualised as the outcome of a power-capacity attributed to the agent in that practice. Such a conceptualisation renders struggles *between practices* opaque to analysis, except in the most lamentably reduced terms; it is also unable to comprehend why positions of real omnipotence are not available to certain agents. These positions do not exist because outcomes are secured only through practices (not through the exercise of a fixed power-capacity), and any practice is subject to determinate conditions, of which the possibility of *opposing* practices is an obvious and important example. Foucault makes the point, showing up the constraint of a whole network of practices on the ability of agents to secure outcomes: 'But as for power . . . We know that it is not in the hands of those who govern. . . . It is often difficult to say who holds power . . . ' (M Foucault, 'Intellectuals and Power', *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Oxford 1977, p 213.) At the same time, Foucault's formulations are not exempt from the criticisms outlined here.

46 separate the two sets of circumstances, the set which defines character, and the set which that character constitutes as criminal: 'the antecedent acts giving rise to the suspicion may take place on the same day . . . within a short space of time'.⁵⁵ The acts may even run together, as in the text-book example of trying several car locks in succession. Thus the suspicious observer 'makes' the suspect in representation, in a process the 'justice' of which is difficult to articulate; the crime of loitering is marginal in a sense, as an offence with a minimal content of 'fact', but for that very reason it is also central, in that it turns almost entirely on the construction of the guilty subject within the discourses of the legal process. That centrality for the operation of power has to stand as the excuse for further compromise of the law's coherence: in exception to its usual practice, the court will admit the fact of previous convictions (ie previous figurations in the legal discourse) as evidence in a case of loitering with intent.

The advantage of this conception of authority as mythic figure of power, as representation, lies in its operability in analysis: 'legality', 'ethics' and so on are reduced from global-spiritual essences to manageable sets of representational and discursive positions, articulated with more or less coherence. And this applies also to politics. Universal suffrage, and the concomitant mass communication, necessitate an interpellation which is more than a simple subjection, involving also a subjectification which confers both consciousness and agency, but this order of interpellation under the current mode of production itself entails the generation of a heterogeneous audience for any political discourse, the impossibility of a unified political address. Even considered at the most obvious level – the utterances of parliamentary politicians – this means that political discourse always outruns calculation of its effects, that it is always caught in a plurality of signification across the various places of its reception and construction: press, financial interests, multiply divided population. Across these various sites, it cannot be assumed that political agents will always correspond to human subjects. The fact of this diversity is covered over by various essentialist appeals, fictions of a unified audience: 'the national interest' in the discourse of the right, 'the people' in that of the left.

What makes the productive critique of these fictions difficult is the difficulty of specifying progressive positions in the diverse audience from which to pose other representations; any simple class analysis which looks for an obvious and revolutionary 'working class' must come to grief on the unforeseen ability of modern capitalism to weather its crises and provide widespread material contentment, to the extent that *direct* revolutionary impetus is

55 R Cross and P Jones, *Introduction to Criminal Law*, Butterworth's, London, 1972, pp 281-2.

no longer to be found in the West at all, but rather in the 'developing' countries of the 'Third World'. The critique of representation is productive, however, in counteracting the ideology of apoliticality, which reduces politics to a small 'part of life', usually circumscribed in terms of party and parliamentary politics, and thus also renders politics a passive experience for the majority. Democratic political practice seals itself with an ideology of intentionality and the individual from any recognition of a political practice – a practice of power – already operative elsewhere in the constitution of subjects; it thus sustains an appearance of 'social contract' which, in its voluntarism and foundation on the *cogito*, fails to grasp the real workings of power (which failure is precisely its success). It is possible to break that closure of politics, however, by questioning the effects of power in its authoritative figurations, asking what practices and what discourses support and allocate the mythic attributions of power to authority, what economies of power are organised in what distributions and constructions of authoritative representations. Without falling into the delirium of 'combating' power *as such* (like the folly of imagining a rational dialogue with the unconscious) this order of conceptualisation does allow for the principled critique of authority in its images and representation, thus instituting – as another contingent effect of the current power-knowledge conjuncture? – the space of a *practice*, a politically *operable* knowledge and discourse.

II Cinema and Authority

1 Cinema, Super-Ego, Institution

If power is indeed mediated in representations of authority, in figures and fictions, in imaginary identities and discursive positions, then cinema is evidently a considerable arena for this figuration of authority. Such a conception demonstrates cinema to be immanently political; it thus escapes the coyness of the dominant 'apolitical' writing on film, developed from the practices of traditional literary criticism and reviewing, which can relate a determinate form of cinema to a historical social formation only in terms of a represented content, or by a kind of *Zeitgeist* theory, operating at one remove, at a level of abstention from the object, with the respective idealised 'philosophies' of cinema and its historical location. And it further undermines traditional criticism by exploding any 'essence' of cinema: as an instance of discursive practice, cinema can be specified only historically; it does not bring with it its own eternal determinants.

One of the things which marks cinema as an operational site

48 of authority, structured by power as is authority itself, is the fact that it's a practice of the psyche, a practice of the social subject; the way in which it turns the two together yields its discursive effectivity, and, in turn, this consideration of cinema as 'discourse'⁵⁶ sets limits to the theorisation of this double practice. Thus, while it's true that the constitution of the subject is never definitively achieved, never over and done with, it has to be insisted that cinema operates on subjects which are already constituted, which would function as competent and 'complete' were they never to see a film. It's mistaken, therefore, to consider the psychic processes of film viewing as the *same* as the psychic processes of the constitution of the subject, just as it's mistaken to draw an absolute division, conceptualising psychic states as 'attendant circumstances' of viewing, whereas viewing is the fact of those states. Cinema exists as an institution to move, to mobilise, the social subject; avoiding any reductive psychoanalysis of this practice, it can be maintained that what goes on in viewing is a specific continuation and reworking of the psychic processes which constitute the subject, a re-placement of those processes under other modalities.

If cinema cannot take in hand a total process of subjectification from the (mythic) beginning, its mobilisation of images, identities and modes of address nevertheless confers on it a particular applicability to the adaptation of the super-ego, itself the agency most susceptible of reinforcement and/or modification. While cinema suppresses the elements of *discours* (I am using the term here in Benveniste's sense),⁵⁷ those indices of intersubjective exchange in which the ego represents itself as being in control of the flow of communication and cathexis, its privileging of *histoire* gives scope to the unrecognised work of the super-ego, the imaginary judge silently attending to the sense of the semiotic process as the construction of identities and involvement of the libidinal economy. The process of viewing, of 'reading' in the broadest sense, can never be a simple exchange between identities (this is the myth of all communication, even though the cinema is notably deficient in its major supports: propositional form, temporal contiguity of statements, universal access to a stable 'instrument' of communication – which deficiency is to be accounted for in terms of both the production apparatus, *and* the relations of production and circulation in which film is inserted); reading involves the fabrication of a locutor and self-construction after an assumed image, which image will be judged and criticised in relation to the standards of the super-ego, themselves derived

56 Colin MacCabe, 'The Discursive and the Ideological in Film – Notes on Conditions of Political Intervention', *Screen* Winter 1978/9, v19 n4. 57 cf G Nowell-Smith, 'A Note on History/Discourse', in *Edinburgh Magazine* '76, 1976, p 27.

from identifications with other images of authority.

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The problem for political analysis, however, is that of the structuration of a whole discursive field – It cannot be conceptualised in the terms of this individualist model or any homology derived from it. While the model appears to offer a degree of explanation – the dominant discourse can be characterised as that which best conforms to the precepts of the super-ego – it is saved from circularity only by its silence on the derivation of these precepts. Since discursive practice has been shown to be political, that is, implicated in the operations of power and authority, the question of specifying the dominant discourse in any conjuncture can no more be handled by this simply 'psychoanalytic' conceptualisation than it can by those knowledges which try to address it 'apolitically' or 'objectively', notably in the discourses of criticism and aesthetics on the one hand, and sociology on the other.

Authorising itself from an individualist, sensationalist psychology, aesthetics develops a theory of taste which functions as the guarantor of variability under the guise of eternity, maintaining above all a silence on the sociality of its own determinants. In contrast to this well-mannered tyranny of idealism, sociology (of literature, film, 'media', etcetera) insofar as it remains sociological is generally marked by a gruff and economistic materialism on an incorrigibly totalising and functionalist model which threatens a virtual relapse to classical economics' market theory, to Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' and Say's law. Despite a certain balance of deficiencies between these two positions – sociology may tend to neglect 'content' as aesthetics overlooks the material relations of the work – no synthesis can be conceived.

What's needed, instead, is an account of cinema as a practice, an account which operates within a theory of ideology to demonstrate for cinema the mutual implication of discursive practice with the forms of subjectivity and subjectification; and such an account, in its treatment of the subject, must break with the dominant psychologism of aesthetic and critical discourse, opposing to it a theory of the staging of the subject in film, a politics of the imaginary in ideology. (This prescription intends neither neglect nor dismissal of *Screen's* efforts in this endeavour – quite the reverse.) In such a theory, the predominance of particular discursive forms can then be accounted for in relation to determinate protocols of subjection, epistemology, etcetera, which they share with the dominant economy of knowledge and power, to which they stand in a relationship of mutual sustenance. And it follows from this that, in practice, such an analysis would be able to specify the determinate conditions under which outcomes of struggle within the forms of knowledge could produce effects on the discursive forms, and, reciprocally, the ways in which discursive forms could be operated to produce a practical critique of power-knowledge structures.

50 Film exhibits particularly clearly the correspondence between its status as dominant form of discursive practice, and the dominance in the power-knowledge conjuncture of elements on which that practice is built. To take only the most obvious, think of the epistemological nature of film, the processes of 'suspense' and knowledge by which film is solved (made fluid, allowed to flow) and resolved; the tightening of a web of knowledge allows the film to discover its end, and in this sense all film is 'detective' film. Or again, think of film's recruitment of ideologically privileged elements (privileged in part precisely through that recruitment – the process is recursive rather than linear): vision and its relation to knowledge ('*seeing* the truth') and to the category of the subject, narrative and its production and confirmation of identity, turning together the coherence of the subject and the address, achieving the regime of the discursive.

This conceptualisation stems, in short, from a theory of suture,⁵⁸ the tying-in of the subject to those discourses in which it is constituted, confirmed and reproduced for power under forms of authority. The authority of cinema practice can be tentatively characterised as the imperative of the symbolic, the non-negotiable injunction to 'make sense', to assume identity. For the operators of such a theory, the importance of cinema no longer consists primarily in its production of a body of films which are the repository of meaning, but in its invitation to an *activity*: that activity is signification in all its material effects, the necessary reading of meaning in signs, the inescapable (if fantastic) attribution of an intention of significance which raises any material from the inert to the semiotic, and which must underlie any semiotic operation or critique of authority in the form of figures, representations, identities, and so on.

The conception of cinema as an ideological practice entails consideration of the ways in which that practice is situated and relayed in institutions (places, organisations, sets of practices) in which part of the material work of ideology goes forward, either 'unimpeded' or as the outcome of struggles between practices; indeed, cinema itself becomes such an institution, principle of a 'provisional corpus'. Cinema is developed as one of the specialist knowledges by which power informs and monitors the work of 'culture'; in this, it's not to be conceived functionally as the direct tool of power, 'ministering' to it, nor as the constitutive precondition of a certain arena of power, but must be theorised in the difficulty of the relation between the political and the ideological, in the specific conditions of the discursive which are produced.

58 See Stephen Heath, 'Notes on Suture', in *Screen* Winter 1978/9, v19 n4.

If it is ventured that power is 'finally' the foundation of cinema and film studies, this shouldn't be taken to imply a simple unilinear relationship of determination; there is little usefulness in such global conceptualisations of determination, which are in fact unable to provide the required analysis of the production of particular effects in particular conflicts. Colin MacCabe makes this point as the recapitulation of his argument:

'Obviously the lack of a general theory does not imply that there will be no determinate grounds for particular analyses (there is no question of a return to impressionism) but these determinate grounds will not be provided by a general theory of the social totality but by the conditions of political and ideological struggle.'⁵⁹

The institutionalisation of cinema in various practices, but particularly in education, subjects its modes of signification to a definite attention, conceptualising them outside any overtly political realm of rhetoric or discourse, while nevertheless concentrating on identity, address, character, coherence of plot – the terms of literary criticism – and thus refusing to pose the differences, and theorise the relation, between the subject of the enunciation and the subject in ideology. This refusal, which is isolated and correctly criticised in Paul Willemen's 'Notes on Subjectivity'⁶⁰ allows the necessary simultaneity of the two subjects to pass as identity, and in this it is indeed complicit not only with the dominant ideological acceptance, but also with academicist formalism. However, the very possibility of challenging these dominant knowledges, and of producing a theory of discourse able to handle the politics of the articulation of the two subjects, entails that the institution itself can become an arena and even an objective of struggle. And it is not *this* position which is utopian, but rather that attitude which simply dismisses 'academicism' and thus turns its back on engagement in a real struggle with possible worthwhile outcomes and effects, in favour of the mythic and idealised theatre of the 'social formation'.

The institutionalisation of cinema in education involves its breaking down into the regulated subject-matter of a discipline, and its arrangement as a course. The fact that this process is predicated exactly on an indifference to its subject-matter poses a problem for any critique which tries to relate cinema directly to educational practice; the tendency is instead to conduct the discussion at the level of 'theories' of cinema and pedagogy.

59 Colin MacCabe, *op cit*, p 142. My understanding of Colin MacCabe's position has benefited from discussion with him, which I would like to acknowledge here.

60 Paul Willemen, 'Notes on Subjectivity – On Reading "Subjectivity under Seige"', *Screen* Spring 1978, v19 n1.

52 (This may be more clearly true for literature than for cinema, since for cinema both its relatively short and stable history in ideology, and its obvious materiality – the mechanical apparatus, the physical arrangement of screen and seating, etc – favour a direct and literal conception of its place in pedagogic practices.) If this slippage in the level of generality of the discussion is to a certain extent unavoidable and non-reprehensible (at no level of abstraction or specificity will discussion be conducted in other than ideological terms), it also demonstrates the real conditions of engagement, in which the institution will always constrain the terms. It was within the institutionalised cinema that semiology was originally useful in opposing the idealism of traditional impressionist criticism; but at the same time, it was precisely the formalist disposition of semiology which allowed the institutional *re*-location of cinema in education: the growth of film and media study courses corresponded with the heyday of structuralist and semiotic film theory for the reason that this theory offered itself as a set of techniques and operations, easily assimilable to the disciplinary course. If semiology is now to be displaced by a theory of discourse, this little history (deserving of more detailed study) illustrates the crossing of discursive and institutional practices, and the political effects of their struggles.

To call for critiques of the institution which are mounted in practices other than the discursive is at once to point to a blockage – the difficulties of *Screen's* engagement with independent film-making practices for instance – and to an avenue of possible advance – in the analysis of specific articulations of discursive and non-discursive, never fixed and essential. Within discursive critical practice, however, it's possible to suggest the normal functioning of cinema – and literature – teaching within education, and to show a certain disruption of that normal function by 'modernist' as opposed to 'classic', film or literature. (The terms 'modernist' and 'classic' do not attempt to designate essential absolutes, nor is 'disruption' to be mistaken as essentially progressive.)

Education tends to split between a practice of authoritative imposition of a course and an ideal of the authentic assimilation of an experience; this split – caught in German by the distinction between *Bildung* and *Ausbildung* – presents itself in ideology as the problem of securing an individual 'freedom of experience' without falling into incoherence, fantasy and anarchy. The problem can be 'solved' only through an ideological conception of pupils as identical subjects, structured by a common rationality, untroubled by divisions or conflicts; for pupils so conceived, the teaching of classic texts can support *Bildung* by functioning as a demonstration, an evidence, of the concepts of dominant knowledge, and by producing a coextensive alignment of the subjects of address and ideology. This outcome is suited to being seen as the approval of a 'social contract', the free subscription of a

homogeneous population of pupils to the power-knowledge positions 'offered' (imposed) in the course. 'Modernism', on the other hand, refuses to offer these coherent positions; constantly problematising the activity of reading, it forces into question the settling of the subject of address on the subject of ideology; the subject *jars*, crossed by a caesura. It's this reintroduction of difference, unmaking subject identities to produce a critical knowledge, which renders modernism, like psychoanalysis (provisionally) impossible for the institution; it tips education towards anarchy, the possible space of other orders.

The presiding associative theory of pedagogy conceives personality as constituted by a dynamism of ideas; the lesson is not simply an addition, but an articulation of the new onto the known (hence the well-known schema of pedagogic technique: preparation, presentation, association, generalisation and application); schooling therefore addresses itself to the stable and regular process which constitutes the mental person as a consensus (ie the coherent alignment of all past selves in the present self, marshalling an identity and unanimity of the individual by means of a teleological evolution). While 'modernism' is amenable to this practice in so far as it's also crucially concerned with process – where modernism is most successfully recuperated for education, it's precisely as a regular formalism, a set of techniques – its conception of process is staged as difference *within* the subject (so to speak 'between' the subject) rather than around the subject, and is thus actually in contradiction with the pedagogic ideal. Modernism's revelling in difference, in plurality of signification, its demonstration of the fallacy of objectivity, are impossible for a system which exploits a totalising determinism and an absolute law of cause-effect with the precise end of establishing an objectivity.

One of the major underpinnings of this objectivity is the concept of authorship, serving to close down the text into the positivity of a communication (author, authority, authorisation: the chain of puns subtends any theorisation of 'reading'). The usefulness of the theory of discourse against this concept is that it displaces at once the author of aesthetics — the transcendental subject — and the author of structural linguistics — effect of the structure. In fact only fantasy produces the 'author' of a work, but no sooner does the author appear than the institution clamps it into a problematic of origin, interpellating the concept of an originating authority to evade the question of the determinate effectivity of a particular discursive articulation. Claiming to be in position 'before' and 'beyond' the operation of discourse, the author is the double of the ideological subject, equal and opposite product in the work of 'Writing, which has had as its function to transform a fantasy into fiction and a fiction into vision, the Absent One into some one, the spectator into a double of himself and the

A second objective evidence is supplied by the concept of 'text'. In fact, the text is always other, because signification articulates on desire, narrative on the unconscious ('As a fiction, the Oedipus serves for something at least: to make good novels, to tell good stories', Roland Barthes);⁶² the text always outruns the version given of it – which isn't to assert a positivistic full text 'elsewhere': it's always a question of representations, the unconscious can never be tracked down and known as a set of contents. In the opposition of readings, however, discourse on the text tends to fall either into a pluralism which assumes an indifference to its own unacknowledged politics (but is not therefore ideologically neutral), or into a positivism of the text which forgets the resistance and productivity of signification. The displacement of this problematic is fraught with difficulty; however cautiously a reading is qualified, however it renounces any claim to be definitive, it cannot but address a real, determinate and effective discursive organisation to which it is necessarily constituted as a response. The conceptualisation of this determinate organisation – which is *not* the positivist text, but which authorises the practice of treating a film as a discrete text with its own level of specificity, a practice which has a certain justice over and above the evident fact that films present themselves for consumption in this phenomenal form of individual texts – this conceptualisation, then, and the analysis of the effectivity of this organisation on/in the reading subject, are the immediate problems posed for the theory of discourse. For now, the only way to avoid the irresponsibility of pluralism, or the absurd responsibility of a metadiscourse charged with speaking the truth of the true, is to renounce the stance of the critic towards the text. This may involve a willingness to break the text and constitute new objects: while 'the film' is the filmic text *par excellence*, it is by no means the only one, and regularities at other levels, such as genre, shot, sequence, and so on, may be found more serviceable for the objectives of particular analyses (the work of Metz is exemplary in this respect). It's necessary, instead of readings to offer productions, in the place of commentary, 'traductions' (which may be both translations and betrayals); it's necessary in short, to become a political operator of cinema and discourse.

Always implicated in a whole discursive conjuncture, always conditional and subject to the discourses which reconstruct it in an instrumentality, cinema can never be either anti-authoritarian or repressive *as such* (it may have such effects, but these are

61 Jean-Pierre Oudart, 'Travail, lecture, jouissance', cit Stephen Heath, 'Notes on Suture', p 62.

62 Cited by S Heath, 'Système-Récit', in *Ça-cinéma*, nn7/8, Paris, May 1975.

never given absolutely). This is the kind of misconception which issues from a Reichian position; while it may be true that films as artistic works are the product of sublimated energy, only a mistaken conflation of the psychic ego with the social subject can found the attempt to draw political consequences from this, and such a theory encourages an 'opiate' theory of political action and consciousness, assuming a fixed quantity of energy to be liberated or 'diverted'. Artistic production becomes a kind of pacific (ie overtly 'peaceful') repressive apparatus, and the return of repression theory involves taking at their face value the problematic concepts of aesthetics and authority. In such a theory, art can only be conceived as an instrumental diversion of energy, a kind of emaciating libidinal levy imposed from above to ensure submission. The general failures of repression theory have been exposed at length above; suffice it to add that this artistic variant can offer no account of consumption of film. It is correct on the passivity of that consumption, but could never specify this passivity in its economic and institutional determinations; moreover, it fails to account for the quiescence of the submissive population. The theory could only be embarrassed by the question of the 'politically active' film-maker; and finally, it imposes that false polarity underlying the leftist proletarian nostalgia which assumes popular art to be more vital, the art of 'working men' or 'peasants in touch with the earth' – the pious nonsense of Bertolucci on 1900.

Thus Marcuse only half grasps the point when he criticises Reich for failing to distinguish between repressive and non-repressive sublimation: what's at fault is rather the social extension of a psychic function, and indeed the whole temporal model of sublimation, with its suggestion of an impossible reversibility and a constant quantity of energy to be either liberated or sublimated. If the implication of psychic energies in cinema does have political effects, these are to be specified not in terms of the fact of cinematic production, but in terms of the modalities of the cinematic product.

2 Cinema and the Politics of Discourse

Cinema in its politicality is neither an essence nor a content, but the effect of a whole discursive conjuncture, and the internal relations of its elements and practices; the political theorisation of cinema can't go ahead except as part of the 'political phenomenology' offered by a study of 'writing' (Barthes) – which includes literature, television, film, journalism, academic and pedagogic practice: all those practices which fabricate a historical position for the subject in signification under the species of recording and representation ('documents are forgeries by nature before

56 or after it is obvious').⁶³ A brief illustration of the politics of the discursive, at their most literal, could be taken from the history of cinema newsreels. From 1929, when Ramsay MacDonald inaugurated the era of the 'talkie statesman' on the first sound newsreel, the fortunes of the political parties were intimately connected with their skill in using newsreels, a skill which involved not simply a politicisation of the cinema but also a corresponding 'cinematisation' of political address.

The development of sound newsreels in 1929 coincided with the first general election with the universal franchise granted the previous year; under these conditions, it's crucial to find a universal, homogenising address, and the newsreels take in hand the turning-in of the viewer to a national identity, forging the British subject through a variety of techniques, such as implicit values, interchange of first and second persons on the sound-track ('you' and 'I' becoming 'we', plural but non-contradictory), relations between sound and image, and so on. The 1935 election saw the first systematic newsreel campaign and, after the return of Baldwin's government, the realisation that the newsreel offered not only a channel of communication, but also an instrument of consciousness and memory; the Conservatives produced newsreels in which their campaign speeches were re-run, cut in with retrospective captions from the perspective of their subsequent victory.

'We think of the past as being there unchangeable. Actually the past is ours to shape and change as we will.'⁶⁴

Speech becomes a manipulable artefact; the recorded speech becomes writing, crucially subject to other writing, and to rewriting.

Image and address are themselves brought to crisis with the Munich crisis. To ensure its supply of news, Gaumont was forced to make a deal with Göbbel's department of information; sustained newsflow was necessary to maintain the representations which supported Chamberlain through the unprecedented diplomacy of Munich (Chamberlain's first trip by air also inaugurated the plane flight as a diplomatic act, and the airport interview as a political mode and media genre). The crisis in the ideology of communication in which Chamberlain attempts to *talk* with Hitler is not limited to diplomatic practice; if the Munich crisis is political, it's also discursive, the crisis of a regime of writing; the specific relationships between the two in this instance would provide the subject for a whole study elsewhere.

In any consideration of 'film' in relation to authority, there can be no question of forming coherent genres or traditions on the

63 William S Burroughs, *The Job*, revised edition, New York, 1974, p 36.

64 Ibid, p 35.

strength of general relations to a globalised power. Selection of texts as objects, and indeed determination of the order of textuality, cannot be justified in advance from a general theory, which could only be a reductive or formalist counterpart of the categories of criticism. Selection can only be justified from 'outside', on the criteria of a political operation which evaluates the fitness of specific texts and analyses for the demonstration of the transformation of the 'outside', 'inside'; that is, the discursive work of film, and evaluates those analyses themselves in terms of specific objectives and effects in the production of knowledge and discourses in struggle, articulates itself, that is, in the politics of discourse which it analyses.

This policy of writing guards against the naïveté which would value the deconstructive, the perverse, or even the incoherent as such, outside the calculation of particular strategies and attempts to displace particular opposing practices. But it also contains a warning; to pose those categories as global essences is to play directly into the hands of critical discourse, which can recuperate them either in the service of pluralism, or as *unitary* conceptions (whatever disunity they conceptualise) to stand as candidates in competition for the value of a positivistic 'truth' of cinema. The internal contradictions of a critical discourse which might pose 'heterogeneity' as a principle of unity cause that discourse no embarrassment: criticism refuses any disruptive critique from within, its indifference tolerates anything. These concepts of heterogeneity must rather be mobilised from outside, in opposition, in particular arenas of conflict. The kind of claim to be made for these concepts is not of the same order as the unreflecting jostling of concepts within critical discourse (obviously this separation entails no appeal to a science/ideology distinction); these concepts produce no definitive knowledge of either the film or the cinema in themselves, precisely because film and cinema do not exist in themselves. To claim the former would be to posit the text in terms of positivist ontology, replete in an authoritatively assigned politicality 'outside' and 'prior to' any analytical intervention; the latter entails an essentialist conception of cinema as autonomous object rather than determinate practice. These conceptions have in common their effect of *paralysing* discourse, which is fixed by their tyrannical absolutes, its only possible space being the same – repetition of the text; in place of which it's necessary to elaborate a mobile, operable knowledge.

In calculating its effectivity, this knowledge takes into account conditions which include more than simply the object-text itself, and this involves a certain change in the overt status of the text, which becomes to some extent a 'pretext'; what's crucial is never the object alone, but rather the moment of the discourse in which it's constructed, the effectivity of that discourse in political ideology on other productions and practices. While the text may func-

58 tion as a pretext, its reworking must aim to catalyse it beyond the passivity of a mere 'illustration', to renovate and replace the text, through the operation of a knowledge, as a determinate element in the discursive conjuncture. The recognition of the text as pretext opens practical possibilities, but also presents a certain danger, that of failing to engage sufficiently with the specificity of the text; this is evident to some extent in the work of Colin McCabe in *Screen* (I take this example simply because it provides an instance of a *sustained* body of analyses of commercial films). A reading of these analyses, from *Klute* through *American Graffiti*, *Nashville* and *Days of Hope* to *Padre Padrone*, can disengage a certain repetitiveness of what is said about these films; and while this repetition has its justice – it responds to a certain level of regularity existing across those texts, to another order of textuality to be found there – it also indicates the current problem, which is precisely the definition of that level of discursive regularity and its effects, and its understanding in its *double* relation, first, to the analytic discourse (produced by a subject which is more than, other than, the simple subject of that level of discourse, and produced in response to a text which is more than, other than, the simple instance of that level: specificities which are not to be reduced to subjectivism, but which return some of the implications of Metz's question, 'Why did I like this film (I rather than another, this film rather than another)?')⁶⁵ and secondly, to the specificity which marks each film in its difference, which supports its demand to be discussed as a unique and discrete text, and obliges a certain (difficult) respect of this particularity in analysis.

The operations of these levels and these subjects are crucially brought together in the *reading*. Readings implicate both discursive and nondiscursive practices, and the appearance of *mixture* which they present is continued in the fact that they address a film – which is in some sense a determinate and constraining object – but also produce other regularities, other texts, which are not evident. Every analysis concedes that its reader has seen the film, but it also produces the film as that which the reader *did not see*. The authority of this supplementary practice must be called in question.

We can begin with the question of the heterogeneous knowledges mobilised in analysis. McCabe's reading of *Nashville*, for example, is categorical in its statement that in *Nashville*, 'The post-Vietnam sophisticated film-going public is offered an image of the falsity and idiocy of Middle America, an image which in its superiority to Middle America's television pulls that sophisticated public into the place that it already occupies: spectator at an Altman movie.'⁶⁶ The analysis *knows* this, as it were, 'already';

65 Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen* Summer 1975, v16 n2 p 23.

66 McCabe, op cit, p 38.

there can be no question of reading this out of the body of the text. What is important is the way this knowledge is put to work, and that involves a demonstration of *Nashville's* address to this audience, the effects of that address under specific conditions. To ask after the possible vicissitudes of that address is beside the point: we do not deny that other readings could be produced, or that there is a certain validity in the reviews of *Nashville* which were produced in, say, the Country and Western music press. Nor is there any usefulness in a variant of Willemen's and Eco's probabalistic 'bet' on reading, in counting heads, evaluating proportional strengths of readings, and then producing the reading as vector sum of these strengths. To answer Willemen's question,⁶⁷ artistic production is not to be seen as a form of gambling because it is never a question of hitting the jackpot with the right permutation of text and viewer which produces the reading. You can bet your life that every viewer will produce a reading, and what matters is not to judge them on the putative legitimacy of the knowledge they mobilise, but to evaluate the kind of demonstration they allow, and the effects of that demonstration in the discourses that it engages. Thus, to accept that readings differ, and that this differing has its validity, is not to embrace indifference; one reading is *not* therefore 'as good as another', and the critical question is always: good *for what*? In the discourse of *Nashville*, 'Insofar as we already know, it is evident that there is nothing we can do';⁶⁸ if MacCabe's analysis is sustained as a reading of that discourse, it's also sustained as its opposite: only insofar as we know can we do anything.

To assert the 'partiality' and interests of knowledge involves, first, a displacement of a certain false distinction seized in the opposition of 'critic' and 'theorist' (usually posed in terms of normativeness, but amounting to the claim that one is 'scientific', the other 'ideological'), and secondly, to open the question of the *objectives* of knowledge. To deny that the operations of analysis are principled is to elaborate a position complicit with the dominant power-knowledge forms, and to lose the opportunity to specify desirable changes. Exemplary in its stance was *Cinéthique's* definition of 'the film that needs to be made',⁶⁹ although the actual definition collapsed the terms of the desired 'materialist' film on to those of a fetishised cinematic specificity, the use of 'purely' cinematic codes, thus regressing to an essentialism and failing to pose the political questions of heterogeneous knowledge and the practice of discourse in its operation of the subject. What is crucial for interested discourse is not knowledge of essential

67 Willemen, *op cit*, p 50.

68 MacCabe, *op cit*, p 39.

69 *Cinéthique*, in *Screen* Spring/Summer 1973, v14 nn1/2, p 193.

60 cinema, but the production of alternative relations in, to, and of film.

The production of other filmic relations offers a real arena of struggle, but one of its conditions is that the limits of that arena are not ignored; above all it is imperative not to reduce the determinate specificity of the cinematic and to collapse discourse on cinema on to an effort to change the social formation. This is indeed to accept an idealised account, and to neglect the real work to be done. For *Screen's* project – to adapt Brecht – the cinema must indeed be at the centre of things, but relatively; it's necessary to evaluate the stakes in the kind of struggles which can be won: these struggles are taking place in the cinema, in film theory, and, perhaps above all, in educational institutions. A sketch of 'first steps' would have to treat the dissolution of the author and the imaginary, legal and economic relations supported by the concept of authorship; it would have to pose again the question of narrative, and of the articulation of the discursive and the ideological, as the introduction of the crucial question of *pleasure*: if there is a single issue which has repercussions throughout the whole power-knowledge conjuncture, it is that of another economy of film capable of being critically productive in its organisation of the *pleasure* of the will to knowledge.

In relation to these changes, it's timely to pose again (for where were they taken up?) two specific questions raised by Stephen Heath: first, of narrative which is *exhaustive* of film and subject, its unified figure for sale and consumption, and the alternative: films to see again, or better, 'films that it is impossible "to have seen once"': and secondly, the 'fundamental political question' of the relation of images and sounds, the question "'how do you hear a film?'"'.⁷⁰ Both these questions are germane, for example, to *Padre Padrone*, and it would be possible to extend the analysis of its paralysing effect on political knowledge and action by considering its extreme conservatism on both these points. The film operates on a strong (not to say crude) separation between voice and image, which is not to imply that the two are not in agreement. If the voice runs slightly ahead in the narration, it is always backed up – in every sense – by the illustration provided by the image. This works to establish an authority of the voice, built upon the incremental demonstration of the images, their constant concurrence; and the effect of this is that the voice is finally consumed simply as a content: in its auditory 'transparency' on to truth, it is unquestioned as sound, it passes '*unheard*'. The corollary is that the image 'goes without saying'; the numbing, *truistic* effect produced by the film (how to respond? 'Yes, it's *true*: fathers are harsh, peasants have a hard life – so

70 Heath, 'Screen Images, Film Memory', *Edinburgh Magazine* '76, 1976, p 35.

what?') is accounted for in the fact that we have indeed heard it all before, and in the film itself. And since it constrains the viewer in a position of agreement by a principle of repetition, by the force of a tautology, the saying exhausts the 'said, there is no possibility of anything which is not seen 'at once' (immediately and at one viewing), anything left over to come back for.

Around these, or other, questions, it is possible to aim for particular objectives by the mobilisation of interested knowledge invested in practices which are located in particular struggles. The practice of immediate concern to *Screen* is that of reading, the immediate arena of struggle is a certain body of institutional practices, both discursive and non-discursive. To raise the problem of interested knowledge and its mobilisation in this way is to displace a different, sterile problematic of the authorisation of readings which is caught in hesitation between 'the formalist dream of the reading and the voluntarist nightmare of my/our reading';⁷¹ what is absolutely essential is that *Screen* should consolidate the theorisation of discourse, in order to block any relapse into the argument of the authority of immanent meaning against that of outside determination.

'The reading of a film is neither constrained absolutely nor free absolutely, but historical.'⁷² What is still problematic for the theorisation of discourse – what the theory of discourse itself needs to be – is the articulation of the historical subject (subject of ideology) with the subject produced by the text (subject of address, but an address which is itself historically specific). If the danger-point of this theory is the text's specificity and its tendency to vanish ('free' reading) or to dominate ('constrained' reading), then perhaps it is to the point to propose, briefly, a re-activation of Metz's concept of 'textual system' as capable of doing justice to the historical complexities.

Displaced from the idealism of a *langue/parole* split, the concept of 'textual system', or 'filmic system', provides for the irreducibility of the film in the heterogeneity it mobilises – it is, 'among other things, a unique utilization, proper to this film, of the resources provided by the cinematic language system'⁷³ – but that very mobilisation entails that analysis is constantly run out of the singularity, as attested by Stephen Heath in the analysis of '*Touch of Evil*':

71 MacCabe, op cit, p 36.

72 Heath, cited by Nash & Neale, 'Film: History/Production/Memory', *Screen* Winter 1977/78, v18 n4, p 78. (Since this section of the article was written, this formula has been repeated in Stephen Heath's article 'Difference', *Screen* Autumn 1978, v19 n3. Several issues raised in the present article – of the irreducible discreteness of the film, of the determinate conditions of readings, of 'representation held to use' – converge with the discussion conducted there, and the reader is therefore referred to that article, especially pp 104-110.)

73 C Metz, *Language and Cinema*, Mouton, The Hague, 1974, p 92.

62 '... the present analysis has not been able to 'centre' the filmic system ... to hold to the clarity of division and relation between cinematic and non-cinematic ... Access to the filmic system is to pull the film in this dual construction, homogeneity and the heterogeneity it contains.'⁷⁴

As: 'the activity of integration ... ultimate (or first?) principle of unification and intelligibility'⁷⁵ textual system offers a (fictive) archive, forged on the trace of a work of signification.

The concept of textual system can be used against the simply linguistic theory of subjectification: constantly in movement, never open to re-encirclement by the work of a 'central' code, 'what makes the system of the film is the *passage* from one code to another'.⁷⁶ This movement, this 'homogeneity and the heterogeneity it contains', represents the impossibility of conceptualising 'inner' and 'outer' for the film and its reading: it is the fact of the text's excess over itself, of the constant return of cinema in film, and the historicity of that. 'Filmic system' is the impossibility of holding film back by force entirely on the side of the cinematic, and of holding the cinema to an ahistorical codical instance. The 'double and unique movement' by which the film mobilises codes, touching and detaching itself from them, the sliding system of relations between the codes implicated ('something of a structural and relational order, but never forcibly exhaustable'), filmic system is, finally, the return of the terms of an economy, finally, the impossibility of a formal grammar and the position taken on that.

The brief digression on 'textual system' proposes it as a concept able to manage a reading which is 'neither constrained absolutely nor free absolutely, but historical': historical, as was suggested above, not simply in its production, but also, crucially in its implementation. A reading is historical and also, insofar as it enters historical struggles, is *political*. To say this is to expose a crisis. Emerging throughout a series of articles in *Screen*, of which Willemsen's and MacCabe's are the latest, emerging through this article itself, is an appeal to the political which is problematised by the emptiness of the concept of 'politics'. It is necessary to correct this if our discourse is to be taken seriously as an effective practice, is to *be* such a practice. Discourse stands and falls on its own grounds, and not in relation to a nether world of theories which it more or less accurately 'expresses', but this does not entail that the struggles taking place within discourse do not have effects on other practices and struggles; quite the reverse.

The difficulty for the conceptualisation of politics is that a politics cannot be provided by a *general* theory which would claim

⁷⁴ S Heath, 'Film and System: Terms of Analysis', *Screen* Summer 1975, v16 n2, p 113.

⁷⁵ C Metz, *op cit*, p 100.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p 102.

to be authoritative over every instance; but at the same time the analysis of *specific* conditions of struggle will not yield the conceptualisation of those specific conditions under the form of the kind of *global category* which the term 'politics' has designated. This 'disappearance' of politics can be illustrated by a judicious distortion of Colin MacCabe's conclusion: 'If these *theoretical* considerations enable us to appreciate the conditions for political intervention . . . they do not, however, provide any immediate solution to the conditions of intervention into any specific debate or struggle.'⁷⁷ Across the dots imposing a separation between the theoretical considerations and the specific struggle (a separation *introduced* here for the purposes of demonstration), what slips is the term of the political. We are far from denying that the specific struggles are political, simply denying that their politics can be provided in advance: there are politics of struggles, for certain; there may also be *a* politics (the question of politics as a separate instance is at present an open one); but what is absolutely crucial is that the political as a (problematic) general category cannot be legislative for the politics of struggle, and cannot do the work of their concepts in specific analyses.

There is at present, then, a certain embarrassment in the theorisation of politics but, while these considerations are cautionary and point to a need to know precisely what we intend in using the term 'political', this inhibiting response is not entirely justified. If theory cannot be settled in a global politicality where it opposes power as such (the startling inanity of Deleuze: 'theory is by nature opposed to power'),⁷⁸ this by no means reduces its value in particular struggles, and in fact emphasises the need to fight each struggle for what it immediately is;⁷⁹ thus the calculation of institutional struggle, for example, must be made in terms of the particular conditions obtaining in that arena, where the 'politics' of that struggle are to be initially posed. This is not to deny the extension of the political effects of such a struggle, but rather to insist that its politics cannot be posed immediately at a global level of changes in the social formation. That kind of totalising thought (and its issue, the voice of a political *demand*), which conceives of politics as determined by the economic instance and thus demands the authorisation of all actions by reference to the progressive 'interests' of a revolutionary proletariat, or necessary historical tendency (forces which it constructs at the level of a general theory) can only serve to inhibit real and practical action:

'Analysis in class terms specifies one set of features of the conditions of action of agents involved in production, but it doesn't

⁷⁷ MacCabe, *op cit*, p 42.

⁷⁸ 'Intellectuals and Power', in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, *op cit*, 1977, p 208.

⁷⁹ cf Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain, 'Conclusion' to *Marx's 'Capital' and Capitalism Today*, v2, London, 1978.

64 determine what the other conditions will be, and neither does it ensure that the agents concerned will regard it as the most important issue to fight about.’⁸⁰

In conditions cut across by more determinations than can be specified by that general class theory which has founded Marxist politics, where is the action of struggle to be given its ‘reality’ in analysis? At the risk of apparent banality, there are definite grounds for understanding ‘the real’ in its simple, everyday sense: the struggle as it appears is a real struggle, struggles within ideology (where else?) have their reality. This understanding does not challenge ‘the real’ as a value in psychoanalytic discourse; it aims rather to circumvent a certain danger that ‘the real’ (or ‘the real’ and ‘the Real’) may become the Emperor’s new clothes of the theory of discourse – a danger promulgated as much by those who attack the authority of the discourse of the institution, while nevertheless authorising themselves from an acceptance of its terms, as by those who produce that institutional discourse.

To refuse the legislative authority of a general theory is to refuse to ascribe ‘real interests’ to agents on the strength of their class position alone, and over and above the specific conditions obtaining in the struggle under analysis; but to make this refusal, and not to look in practical analyses for a prioritisation and dominance of the relations of production as arenas of struggle, is not to close down the possibility of specifying effects of struggle. On the contrary, it opens a field of practices – within the institutions of education, within the practices of cinema-going, day-to-day reviewing, and so on – the politicality of which is not to be discounted because they do not impinge directly on organisations of interest supposedly determined by the economic. Such practices have effects in political ideology in a way which really contributes to the critique of ideology and the modification of power, but their analysis will demand a reconceptualisation of ‘politics’ in terms of the aims and objectives at work, and conditions obtaining, in specific practices of power-struggle.

The disappearance of an economically-determined ‘politics’ which could be given in advance, and the questionable ability of Marxist general theory to furnish a politics, has put the political instance under debate. Without seeking general theoretical guarantees, the next step must be to implement and develop the theory of discourse, establishing the reality of politics in specific analytic engagements in power-knowledge struggles, as these go ahead in the practices of the institutions with which *Screen* is involved.

80 Barry Hindess, *Power: Capacity or Outcome of Struggle?* unpublished paper, 1978.

Cine-Repetitions

Raymond Bellour

In this article I will attempt to outline the various meanings of the word 'repetition' in the specific area of film (films) and of cinema. Repetition as a concept is both too general and yet very precise, which is its strength. I shall examine how it activates the different interwoven levels of experience presiding over the production, the products themselves and the understanding of cinema.

EXTERNAL REPETITION (1) A film, at any rate a fiction film, like a play or a piece of music, is rehearsed: the actors rehearse the scene, the shot to be filmed. But these rehearsals (repetitions) do not aim to achieve an ideal performance through a process of perfection, to be reworked from the basis of that work itself. They aim to achieve a fixing, involving a kind of repetition which duplicates that of the act or the object represented; the repetitions vary during shooting. Firstly they vary *in number*, according to the obsession and the style of the film-maker, and according to the techniques and the nature of the subject being filmed. This, of course, concerns the fiction film. In documentaries there are without doubt usually at least two takes (if only for 'safety'). But mostly each of these takes has a specific status, already differentiated from the other: indeed one approaches the limit – fascinating when you get there – where the thing filmed cannot be repeated, since it is a real event to which the camera is bearing witness. The repetition of space, then, is substituted very often for a repetition of time: if it is known and anticipated, the unique event is simultaneously filmed by several cameras which repeat each other without ever being able to duplicate one another absolutely. Nevertheless, the repetitions of the takes are just as variable in their *nature*: as much by their numerous paradigms, willingly or unwillingly put into play (framing, lighting, etcetera) as by these more or less subtle variations of the same thing which,

- 66 in the fiction film, strive to catch the actor's expression in order to hold that discontinuous moment of eternity that will be indelibly fixed in the thread (film) of representation.

EXTERNAL REPETITION (2) Contrary to the theatrical or musical production, whose repetitions vary with each performance, filmic representation is constituted by a printed text, the identity of which, ideally, is repeated absolutely unchanged.¹ This identity is not a pure one. The quality of the print of a film varies according to the conditions under which a print is struck; in particular it is subject to permanent deterioration, which makes its reproduction the very moment of its material destruction. Screening conditions, on the other hand, are in themselves infinitely variable: from the slight variations between cinemas within one distribution circuit, to the massive variations involved in the transition from one format to another (35mm, 16mm, super 8) or even more clearly through a transformation of the medium and of certain of the material conditions of the cinematic apparatus, as is the case with films shown on television. Yet through these variations, however great they may be and which on television even go so far as to jeopardise the characteristic tones of the image, an obstinate identity is maintained: that of a text, which in a sense is all the more elusive for being fixed, as that of a book, but moreover frozen, as long as one does not tamper with its 'mystery' in the indefensible repetition of it unfolding.

INTERNAL REPETITION (1) Repetition is internal when it pertains to the very body of the film, to its most elementary and paradoxical level: that of the single frame.² It is elementary because it is not seen: the speed at which the film is projected is designed to mask this mechanical repetition, to efface its silent weave. Only the editing table, the actual handling of the film, allows one to experience its reality. An endless repetition, twenty-four times per second. But this repetition is, of course, paradoxical. Once on the editing table or on the re-winding table, when the film is severed from its unfolding-process, one thing becomes obvious straight away: the perpetual oscillation, from one frame to another, between a minute or zero difference and a more marked difference. Let us imagine a static shot of a landscape, where nothing or almost nothing moves, or a shot of a woman sitting, or of a man sleeping. And inversely, let us imagine a character running and moving out of shot; in the last but one frame, one can still see him almost from the chest upwards; in the last frame, one sees nothing but a foot, and the same for a rapid camera movement

1 I have already approached this problem but from another viewpoint in 'The Unattainable Text', *Screen* Autumn 1975, v16 n3.

2 See Sylvie Pierre, 'Eléments pour une théorie du photogramme', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, nn226-227, Jan-Feb 1971.

significantly altering the framing. Through the smallest to the largest differences between photograms, the repetition of the successive frames thus carries the coming into being of the film. But these differences are never that large except in films which play on visual acceleration and 'denaturalise' the unfolding process, even going so far as to have a different shot for every frame in the second part of *Two men* by Welner Nekes.

INTERNAL REPETITION (2) The second internal repetition, which is also cinematic because it involves specific codes, and yet is already filmic because it determines more or less the development of the textual system, pertains to that fundamental form of cinematic language, very often invoked but so seldom studied: alternation.

By alternation I mean a structure of opposition between two terms, which develops through the return of either one or both terms according to a process of more or less limited expansion: $a/b/a'$, $a/b/a'/b'/$, and so on. This principle of alternation – which pertains to the fundamental phenomenon of the separation and succession of shots so rightly defined by Malraux as the formative movement of cinematic language – can be subdivided according to the following codic specifications, of which it regulates the course and articulates the discourse: point-of-view, in its widest and richest sense, founded on a to-ing and fro-ing between the subject and the object of his vision;³ the various forms of shot-reverse-shot that regulate so many filmic exchanges; the scales of framing, as soon as they are somewhat systematised, by a to-and-fro process between the motifs they circumscribe; the opposition between a static shot and a moving shot, which lends itself to the same type of formalisation; the narrative distributions between shots in the syntagmatic types of the alternated syntagm and the parallel syntagm, or better still, following the three types (alternating, alternated, parallel) that Metz had first distinguished in his first version of the 'Grande Syntagmatique'.⁴

One can imagine other levels of structuring which, in relation to a more or less specific generalisation of the principle of alternation, are comparable to this or that codic level, depending on a given narrative, expressive or discursive inflection (in particular, between the different levels of matters of expression and the matters of the image). In fact, it is necessary to take into account that these levels never cease to combine and to overlap in various ways and at each moment in any given filmic text. On this point I refer the reader to the analyses where, without insisting upon

3 The different possibilities of the point-of-view shot have been catalogued by Edward Branigan in 'Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View Shot', *Screen* Autumn 1975 v16 n3.

4 'La Grande Syntagmatique du film narratif', *Communications* n8 1966.

68 it, I have underlined the plurality of combination which now seems to me to stem from a unitary and diversified principle.⁵ One could object, of course, that what is at stake in the variation between the terms a, a', a'', etc in each of the formal operations I mentioned, is a 'return to' rather than a repetition properly speaking. This because the fragmentation induced by the alternation in most cases and in its own specific ways can be regarded as in a sense merely serving the progression of the narrative by substituting itself to varying degrees for the spatial and spatio-temporal linearity of the representation. But such an objection would misunderstand the force of such a choice which makes that 'return' into a principle, and founds the narrative on an ordered return of its elements: a particular repetition, determined by syntagmatic proximity, the serialisation of its elements into strings. It would also overlook the fundamental tension between difference and equivalence which regulates this serial structuring: it pertains largely to the combination of levels of alternation, to the tendency of some of them (rather more those levels that stem from specific codes within the shot formation) to form themselves into more or less purely reiterative instances, whereas others (for instance, the syntagmatic forms properly linked to the diegesis) integrate of their own accord the difference of the narrative into their reiterative progression.⁶ In most if not all films, this renewed tension does indeed set up a unique order of repetition, which structures the textual expansion through the interaction of forms specifically linked to the formation of the narrative into images. (When there is a narrative: but the avant-garde or experimental films in this respect, according to their peculiar modes involving disruption or loss of chronology, destruction of the representation, and so on, most often only carry to an extreme the relations between difference and equivalence, divergence and repetition,

5 The texts forming the third part of my book, *L'Analyse du film*, Editions Albatros, Paris 1979, brings to the fore, although without really commenting upon them in their own right, the multiple structures of alternation operating in classical American cinema. See in particular the section *Analysier/segmenter* where I indicate the need to come back to this whole question which has been insufficiently discussed in remarks by Metz in *Les Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, Klincksieck, Paris 1968, especially footnote 9, p164. The comments offered here on this point are naturally very brief in so far as the principle of alternation is only envisaged *vis à vis* the general perspective opened up by the problematic of repetition.

6 At this level one ought to distinguish between chronological forms (alternated) and non-chronological forms (parallel) of syntagmatic alternation, which are in a completely different situation with regard to the narrative and its repetition: the first are necessarily in a relation of differential continuity, the others in a hazardous relation which can range from pure repetition (the same image) to maximum separation (two completely different images of the same reality, of the same concept).

by making serial structuring the fundamental condition of textual expansion). 69

INTERNAL REPETITION (3) This is strictly speaking, textual repetition. This form of repetition is no longer specifically determined by the pressure of a specific code, even if it is supported by it. One of its main instruments is the repetition of codes by a process of *mise-en-abyme* [a chinese-box construction] a spectacular construction, constituting the fundamental condition of the textuality of the filmic system: its striking ability to produce the effect of volume. Textual repetition is characterised first and foremost by the fact that its level continually changes, displaces itself, because it encompasses all levels, and everything feeds into it: a narrative segment, a gesture, a sound, a frame, a colour, an exchange of sentences, a decor, an action, a camera movement, or any of them together. A particular regime of textual repetition is, of course, specific to each individual system, contributing, with its own multiple modes, to defining the system's status with regard to the fiction – or the non-fiction – the arrangement of which it organises to eminently variable degrees. This singularity – peculiar to each system – is ordered of its own accord, through the interlocking of relatively definable series, which correspond to as many criteria (authors, genre, period, studios, etcetera) within more or less homogeneous cultural and stylistic spaces, most often corresponding to national boundaries.

Thus from Lotte Eisner's works, it would be possible to infer a certain operation of repetition – narrative, thematised, figurative, compositional – in classical German cinema.⁷ In other respects, the various analyses devoted to several classical American films over the years (Thierry Kuntzel, Stephen Heath, the works of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, my own analyses, and so on) represent a real contextual evaluation of the status of repetition. I myself have insisted on three determinants, the conjunction of which seems to me, because it has been confirmed on many occasions, to outline a type of global apparatus by which the narrative in the classical American cinema, is given as a scenography of repetition.

⁷ This extension of perspective would allow one to specify two further secondary meanings (for they do indeed have a lesser degree of specificity), by which the word 'repetition' concerns the cinema, this time on a strictly intertextual level. Indeed film repeats what a given culture offers. A particularly good example is the way that the German cinema can be seen to have transformed the data of the great anthropological culture of the nineteenth century (stories, tales, tableaux, architectures, philosophical myths) in the filmic space. On the other hand, film repeats itself with its own improvements and successes: the 'remake' is triumphant, as in the classical theatre (consider its success in Hollywood). In fact, to a large extent the two phenomena interact: adaptations, intertextual repetitions, are *par excellence* the subject of a remake, of its variation from one period to another, from one country to another.

70 Firstly there are the effects of micro-repetition which, on the basis of a process of serial repetition, structure the minor units (the shots) of the narrative within most of its major units (segments and fragments). Secondly, there are the effects of macro-repetition (often consisting of micro-repetitions at a remove) which assign to the space of the film the form of a trajectory at once progressive and circular, between a first event and a second one repeating it. This is achieved by an often very subtle distortion of the relations between story and narrative (as understood by Genette),⁸ which tends to duplicate the effect of repetition on to itself in order to link the two given events in the thread of the narrative to anterior event (childhood, the past, History) which, being outside the narrative at the beginning of the reconstructed story, possesses its immemorial meaning and its truth. Thirdly there is the way resolution (positive, negative) acts on these effects of macro-repetition and circumscribes the subject of the narrative like the differential circularity between beginning and end. The narrative is repeated because it is being resolved.

This principle, regulating the narrative's fate, owes its strength largely to the way in which the narrative never ceases by segments, by fragments, to be resolved on to itself, as it were, by partial effects of symmetry, of circularity and compression. These constitute so many successive micro-resolutions where the major resolution of the narrative seems to be echoed and reflected following an effect of continuous-discontinuous reverberations, through an interlocking mechanism of the whole back with the part. Outlining this operation of repetition and its difference resolved in the psycho-analytical perspective into which it is inscribed, this is what I have designated by the phrase *blocage symbolique*. Consider also how in other ways repetition works as an explicit principle in films which it shapes entirely from beginning to end. At the opposite pole of avant-garde cinema, Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* develops serial repetition to a kind of generalised exasperation of alternation, recentred around the metaphor of cinema which it underpins all the better for being one of its fundamental aspects; in Werner Nekes' *Two-men*, repetition saturates the narrative space, endlessly super-imposing story and narrative, by a perpetual return of the fiction to its pure beginning, and through a desintegration of the representative speed, widely differentiating the effects of the serial structuring, the elements of which appear to condense into perceptual blocks, achieving a sort of pure repetition.

8 'story, the signified or narrative content (even if this content is . . . poor in dramatic intensity or intensity of action), *narrative*, strictly speaking the signifier uttered, discourse or narrative discourse itself', Genette, *Figures III*, Seuil, Paris 1972, p72.

EXTERNAL REPETITION (3) This last repetition is that of cinema itself. It serves to designate, beyond any given film, what each film aims at through the apparatus that permits it: in the regulated order of the spectacle, the return of an immemorial and everyday state which the subject experiences in his dreams, and for which the cinematic apparatus renews the desire.⁹ This repetition depending on a set of material and meta-psychological conditions, will be all the more active when the film itself takes on not the representation – which would be impossible – but the fictionalisation of that repetition through its 'work', sometimes so close to the work of dreams, with the psychic-figural operations and the diegesis indissolubly linked.¹⁰ This principle holds for certain experimental films which come exceedingly close to the conditions of existence the filmic-cinematic process (Hollis Frampton's *Nostalgia*, Michael Snow's *Wavelength*) as well as for certain classical narrative films, especially American, where the *mise-en-abyme* or specular construction of the cinematic apparatus links all at once the textualised network of cine-repetitions.

In conclusion I would like to borrow a remarkable example (here barely outlined) taken from Thierry Kuntzel's unpublished work on the 'scene of repetition' in *King Kong*. On the bridge of the ship, the film-maker of the diegesis, Denham, is conducting rehearsals with Ann, the star. The alternated repetition of shot: reverse-shot between the two of them ensures the textual expansion which includes, as its necessary ingredient, shots of the spectators watching the scene. One can easily recognise them as representing the spectators of the fiction film being woven before our very eyes. The shot: reverse-shot system thus renews all the more what it never ceases to mime through the play that turns on identifications: the mirror effect peculiar to the cinematic apparatus, upon which Metz, and earlier Baudry, have so rightly insisted.¹¹ In this scene Ann repeats a cry which, of course, is only meaningful because it is to be repeated again. Later in the forest, when Ann is tied to a stake on the altar, she is under the eyes of the tribe, in a very similar setting, except that the camera is not present. But, as it were, in the place of the camera and of the film-maker – providing the narrative with the equivalent of the shooting of an otherwise missing film – King Kong appears, provoking the full repetition of the cry: the cry, which is now the woman's real cry, was expected, remembered, and almost uttered by the viewer. The latter, of course, knows that he is 'at the cinema' as Metz says. Yet, in the shadow of that knowledge, the film does

9 See JL Baudry 'Le dispositif'; C Metz 'Le film de fiction et son spectateur', in *Communications* n23, 1975.

10 See Thierry Kuntzel, 'Le travail du film', *Communications* n19, 1972; 'Le travail du film, 2', *Communications* n23, 1975.

11 JL Baudry, 'Effets idéologiques de l'appareil de base', *Cinéthique* n7-8, 1970; C Metz 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen Summer* 1975, v16 n2.

72 indeed repeat *his own* dream, his desire to dream. Similarly, by repeating itself the dream becomes metamorphosed to fulfill the phantasy (of the spectator, of the heroine, and of the *mise-en-scène* which lends itself to them in the institution and the society it serves) and from there to model itself on its most insistent form: desire as repetition, the desire of repetition.

Translation by Kari Hanet

The Anti-Narrative (1978)

Peter Gidal

Recently an unnamed marxist feminist was quoted in *The Times* as saying there can be no breakthrough for women until the essentially male (as constructed in patriarchy) linear narrative patterns are smashed.¹ But the dominance of transparency as an ideology, as a political reality, as an economy, functioning on many levels, must be smashed for the culturally induced processes of men's and women's identifications to be smashed as well. We must learn to manage without the reproduction of identifications through, for example, familial structures, without the reproduction of identification *through structures of representation*, familial orientation and biologism being merely the birthplace of such modes for the individuated self. In fact, to speak broadly, dominant ideology places transparency and representation/illusionism at the centre of oppressive structuring in society. Thus we must not manage the way we've managed so far.

My arguments have been directed all along against reproduction in any form, though the so-called ultraleftism² (existent, though not totalistically, in the non-bourgeois feminism of the radical feminists, and unfortunately hardly at all amongst men as yet) of 'being against all reproduction' betrays itself as existing problematically, as has been pointed out for example *vis à vis* my filmworks, which in fact use 'the materials of reproduction not

1 This construction is not transhistorical: the construction onto and through the biological difference neither determining it nor determined by it. See Monique Plaza 'Phallomorphic Power' and the Psychology of "Woman"', *Ideology and Consciousness* n4, Autumn 1978, London, and Christine Delphy, *The Main Enemy*, London 1974, for particularly useful positions.

2 See Note I below.

74 held into the terms of a representation'.³ My theoretical position has always acknowledged this crucial difference, but the necessity of this acknowledgement magnifies the misfortune of being positioned ideologically, inside and through a practice of reproduction, when an end to such practice is what's sought. The concept of reproduction speaks of the empirical, the 'real' 'outside knowledge' – it just so happens that watching an apple fall off a tree does not teach Einsteinian physics, nor does looking at a factory teach capitalism – and the disability to distance oneself from that enough even to posit another way, one which no longer reproduces, one which disallows precisely the need for such. Not to reproduce is either to consume or produce (or both)⁴ and in idealist construction against consumption, which stems from an ahistorical humanism we can well do without (but can't), reproduction becomes valorised and reified – as if it's somehow evil to consume and good not to.

Thus, notions of style become dominant, wherein style is understood as the holding of a specific form for a picture, an image of, a reproduction. One film-maker, Godard, reproduces the real with or through one style, another, Vertov, does so dissimilarly. But the lessons the learners would learn from this are precisely those of naturalism: the image speaks of reality or truth. Pre-Brechtian 'realism' asserts itself, and of course not innocently.⁵ It reasserts itself in the current 'theoretical' debate in *Screen* and without, in a huge blockage, an immense work of reaction, giving fetishistic

3 Stephen Heath, in transcript discussion between Stephen Heath and Peter Gidal, Cambridge, 1977. The problem here is that one is not in a position pragmatically not to reproduce but it is, however, a viable theoretical position. 'Nobody said anything about femininity and masculinity when those first two damaged cells threw in their chips together. How did we hit on the idea of sexual reproduction after getting by for so long with populations of soloist reproducers, who flourished for thousands of years. Probably by accident, and a very long shot at that.' J. M. Smith, *The Evolution of Sex*, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

4 'A transitional stage between capitalism and socialism is defined, at least structurally, by the fact that there is no longer generalised commodity production; that the means of production are no longer commodities; that they have therefore, by definition, lost their character as capital . . .' Ernest Mandel, *The Nature of the Soviet State*, *New Left Review* March-April 1978, n108, p 28.

5 'As to Peter Wollen's piece, "Ontology" and "Materialism" in Film' [*Screen* Spring 1976, v17 n1]: to state that 'any post-Brechtian sense of materialism (must) be concerned with the significance of what is represented, itself located in the material world and in history', is to hark back to notions of given significance, found when searched for, true reality as merely exhumed. It is to see, for example, in Straub/Huillet's *History Lessons*, in the car scenes, 'reality as it is', reality as given not constructed, not as ideological (on, through, by, and for, etc). This is far from work on the signifier. The route of significance is the route of the pre-given, which is the route of subjective interpretation of necessity felt to be correct by *each* interpreter.' (Peter Gidal, Letter, *Screen* Summer 1976, v17 n2.)

significance to Steenbeck-analysis, whilst of course denying it constantly, to 'the' relation of the signifier to the signified, inferring somehow that a film can, or can attempt to, intervene in socio-political reality, to the extent that it becomes a decoy for political work on another level. Ultimately the old bourgeois sociological literary reading of meaning, whether in literature, theatre, music, film, whatever, reaches hardly surprising conclusions: the viewer makes meaning (one step from the notion that consciousness produces the material relations of concrete reality, as opposed to Marx's notion of consciousness as product, as determinate effect of social relations and relations of production).⁶

Slowly, the anti-feminist so-called marxists do their work, to a point at which idealism is entrenched in the name of everything but itself. Such work relates to the matter of reproduction, because if production is repressed and reproduction valorised, we can have no history, nothing new (as opposed to Althusser's 'Something New') . . . nothing old, as redundancy not repetition is here the key (as opposed to Beckett's *Lessness*).

An aside: I take issue with the notion of deconstruction for the very reason that it reinvigorates narrativity, within whatever 'more perfect' definition of diegesis is come up with, imaginary space, mental space, fictive space, rememorated space of action . . . narrative space. Yet this is an incorrect notion, to my mind, of diegesis, which in fact should be seen as separable from narrative. A recent position that there can be non-diegetic film (as opposed to non-narrative film) seems a reformulation of a form of idealism. (It is also terribly naïve as to avant-garde cinema, specifically avant-garde cinema in England. The same naïveté holds irony to have a radical function, is incredulous at its easy recuperability, and sees ironic displacement as another way of saying deconstruction without admitting to such silliness). Such idealism would be to state for example 'Illusion of depth disappears and we enter the realm of the non-diegetic'. In its broadest determinations, it is clear that diegesis resides in every representation, and to suppose for example that *Arnulf Rainer* is a non-diegetic

6 'Consumption produces production in two ways: 1 because a product becomes a real product only through consumption. For example, a dress becomes a real dress only in the act of being worn; a house which is uninhabited is in fact no real house; in other words, a product, as distinct from a mere natural object, proves itself as such, becomes a product only in consumption. Only by destroying the product does consumption give it the finishing touch; for the product is a product not because it is materialised activity, but only as an object for the active subject; 2 because consumption creates the need for new production . . .' Marx, *Preface and Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1976.

76 film is wishful 'thinking', a search for some purity of threshold beyond which presumably the air is clear not murky. What must though be stated clearly is that the existence of diegesis in no way of necessity presupposes the existence of narrative.⁷ This is crucial.⁸

A related interruption:

. . . open question as to whether work/pleasure in film 'viewing' (a difficult concept in itself) equals the (or a) gratification of desire. For Wittgenstein film was the acting out of wish fulfillment/dream (as indeed the dream *per se* was for Freud), and therefore bound to end up with the gratification of desire. Film without a happy ending was (for him) a misunderstanding of the cinema, whether ontologically or cinema-as-constituted, whether descriptive or prescriptive. The question is, can the non-narrative film bring this gratification, this optimistic search, this annihilation of the real which is other and certainly *not* (t)here for gratification (and certainly not for the experience of gratification either) . . . The

7 'For also, and even first of all, through its procedures of denotation, the cinema is a specific language. The concept of diegesis is as important for the film semiologist as the idea of art. The word is derived from the Greek "narration", and was used particularly to designate one of the obligatory parts of judiciary discourse, the recital of facts. The term was introduced into the framework of the Cinema by Etienne Souriau. It designates the film's represented instance . . . that is to say, the sum of the film's denotation: the narration itself, but also the fictional space and time dimensions implied in and by the narrative, and consequently the characters, the landscapes, the events, and other narrative elements, in so far as they are considered in their denotated aspect.' Christian Metz, *Film Language*, pp 97-98, Oxford University Press, London, 1974. Narrative in the end would have to be defined as story, inferrable or otherwise from (effect/affect of) the given, although the problem arises of the ideology of reading a text, in which viewers 'automatically' are placed in positions for themselves which do not necessarily have anything to do with the text/process/procedure/meanings in question.

8 To make some connections with my filmpractice, what follows are my notes for *Silent Partner* (1977):

absence/presence (onscreen/offscreen)

sound sources and synchronicity

gender

rememoration/reduplication/repetition

beginning/end

'extradiegetic'

non-oneness (no-oneness) within/without

documentary/fictive

from meaning to use

process/in-process/how it is (s/he)

inculcated arrestation *attempts*, by definition unsuccessful: the signifier remains: unnaturalised, meaningless, unauthored, anonymous, arbitrary, in combat, specific, historical, in operation, in process, precise.

(September 1977.)

traps laid by and inherent in dominant discourses recuperate avant-garde film which relies yet again and again on work on the signified, (and so-called 'work on the signifier') – films which, like *The Man With The Movie Camera*, an unfortunate model these past 10 years if ever there was one, give the illusion of concretising social reality or (even) dialecticising it. Contemporary social formations cannot be adequately given *through* cinema . . . and the present assumption that the ideological nature of social constructions (of 'society') can be the problematic around and through which a film operates, is incorrect. That any problematics *external* to cinema's *representations* of the social, economic, sexual, political can be somehow portrayed, dialectically or otherwise, or even operated upon and through in cinema, in relation (some how) to social practice of the extra-cinematic (ie all the rest of life including non-cinematic codes) is useful for academic(s)' hope(s) but nothing else. Trying to bring back a hopefulness, a last-ditch attempt to fight, for example, the hideous insights of Freud which lead to nothing such. (And none of the above to imply autonomy to (a) discourse.)

Of course ideology of representations exists, and to reproduce a certain image of, for example, a naked woman is to do precisely such – reproducing in its similarness to 'the real' the ideological representation and the image's meaning (the denotation/the signified) for men and women. That being *held* is to a figure, and if anything I would have thought the absence of (the) body/figure(s) in (the) film would demand a re-call outside the film – such a voice, not a representation of, for instance, woman's voice *inside*. Political power, thus, not voice – a Brechtian realism outside (but through, in the real sense) representation.

Recent valorising of certain representations of women, ones which are again and again so close to the mystery, the secret, the unknown, 'yet' at the same time motherhood, the feminine, and the emotional as to make one wince at the representations and even more at the lack of superego amongst those producing and feeding on them. As no concrete historical materialist analysis or practice has existed for those who play with these images, we find ourselves confronted with profoundly reactionary archetypes covered by verbiage ostensibly denying this fact but in fact revelling in it. Examples could be found in different ways in the films of The Berwick Street Collective, Godard, The London Women's Film Group, Oshima, Comolli, Ackerman, Mulvey/Wollen, LeGrice, etcetera. Women need/men want; women feel/men think; women's visages betray/men's control (mind); men are tough/women soft (lighting plays its part here) *and the opposite*: lines in men's faces signify thought/in women's: ugliness; etcetera. Statements which should really be spewn out as reactionary (but aren't) are condescendingly accepted and reproduced as advanced texts. Film journals ostensibly dealing with advanced film practice are finding

78 easy material after some slack years. This is a dangerous political event within film practice, and its long term effects are being skilfully repressed in exchange for short-term opportunism.⁹

The project must be the distance between knowledge and perception, my project since 1966, but it is one which (due to misreadings by many of marxist texts as to science and knowledge) is constantly subjected to denial. Similarly, some have claimed my films suppress a knowledge of the imaginary of the image by asserting the objectivity of the images and the rationality of our relation to them . . . Those who think this way do not realise that one is in ideology *and* one does ideological combat. One can know of being in process, one can know of constructions operative in image formation/transformation: one does not know, one 'misses' or 'misrecognises' one's position, one's relation, one's bindings/fractures against *that*. ('It' is where I 'am' not.) A film can inculcate positionings which force attempts – moment to moment attempts – at knowledge, attempts at delineating precisely the perception of distance between perception and (absent) knowledge. The apprehension of the functioning of that distance is a position in knowledge. One has to remember the unconscious doesn't get excavated at all; it is constantly operative, for example through repression, but it is of no avail to call on the unconscious as a position against knowledge in the name of non-suppression of the imaginary. That is why it is important to fight against 'the objectivity of the images and the rationality of our relation to them', *not* in the name of a position which seems current: the subjectivity of the images and the irrationality of our relation to them. Such a position might otherwise get close to attributing to the unconscious all the characteristics of the known yet out of control, out of sight. It isn't either universal unknowingness or conscious knowledge, depending on one's political position on/in film. Were one to accept 'it' as the unconscious, one wouldn't use 'it' as an argument against knowledge, against materiality and materialism, in the guise of being against rationalism. Stating the term in terms of the latter would close the case. A materialist isn't a rationalist isn't 'against' the unconscious (which by the way is a process).

What is not needed is 'a different narrative', 'at the limit of fictions of unity' (Stephen Heath), 'an enigma, contradictory': The notion of 'the limit' is both a Barthesian and Metzian notion, one which in fact refuses the necessity of denial, in terms of enactment, if not its mechanism *per se*, and finds pleasure in solidifying limits even in their occasional or constant so-called transgression. Stephen Heath's recent work seems at times to have criticised this position, though still more often than not indulging it.

⁹ See note II, below.

A move away from dominant forms of expression is necessary because dominant forms of expression means *current* dominant forms of expression, which are ones of transparency, invisibility, in which the mechanism, the apparatus, the construction is not such, does not exist. A move away from dominant forms is thus not a matter of anti-manipulation, or deconstruction of certain codes in the sense of explication-after-the-fact, but of *film-as-projected*, as anti-illusionist, remembering that a mechanistic finality to this is not achievable; but attempted anti-illusionist practice through consequent/consistent materialist practice wherein the process is the film, the procedure: construction of production of the film, its effects, of an image of the real, of production of the real (this real).

The attempt at meaninglessness is precisely the non-givenness of meaning,¹⁰ the undermining of determinate meaning, the latter being always and necessarily ideologically produced and arbitrary, and to be given as such (for example, for ideological battle). Somehow the audience mustn't be mentioned: not that structural/materialist (or any) film needs no audience, but the audience isn't the 'answer'; the fact that Freud wasn't read in France until recently doesn't mean that the French don't have infantile sexuality. . . . the fact that Lenin loved Gorki and hated Majakovsky, who was loved for a time by Stalin, and that the masses loved Gorki as well, doesn't prove anything about the political efficacy in the revolutionary sense of any of the abovementioned. Radek's vehemence against Joyce and Trotsky, *and* his death at Stalin's 'hands', says little about the latter's relation to work on the signifier.

It is no more than illusion to assume that most fantasy enacted is not fascist.

Lacan's 'delerium is an act of interpretation' is itself a problem, in that the placing of the subject can be unconscious and (nevertheless) remain unproblematic. A curious idealism, this unconscious wavy-swaying of the spectator-tress (subject) which if 'found' to be 'heterogeneous', somehow suffices for 'contradictoriness', 'production not consumption', etcetera, ultimately by way of the redundancy *being is being* opposed to a metaphysic

10 'The possibility of contemplation offered by photographs is recouped and even radically undercut in *Film Print* (Gidal, 1974) by the continually moving picture . . . when meaning does seem to emerge (it) is immediately displaced by denial of the space . . . The suppression of meaning-production as a cinematic process is a structuring feature of the film . . . The repetitions, the radical refusal of semioticity (denial of the codes of dominant cinema but also the codicity of structural film itself) and the unfixed nature of the space articulated by the film, all serve to operate against the kind of closure associated with a defined and homogeneous film space.' Annette Kuhn, February 1977, *Perspectives on the British Avant Garde*, Hayward Gallery, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1977.

80 of knowing. But there are other possibilities: 'What is interesting here is to grasp the extent to which narration is, in our imaginary of film, as important as, and in fact, more important than, narrative: film, that imaginary has it, must be representative *for*, in order, directed towards something for someone (narrative as the common ground of film and spectator). Thus with *Condition of Illusion* the power of the response against the film to find an order of narration, a direction; 'against the film', since what such a response has to ignore, impossible in the experience of the film, is once again, the repetition, the disturbing return of the signifier across the signs of any narration.' Stephen Heath¹¹. This position, a momentary realisation of the position of narrativity in structural/materialist film, asserting itself only through the displeasure of the battle against voyeurism, superiority, and its sustenance through lack of pleasure, is not easy for anyone to uphold. Which is why I insist work, not play; process of construction not Steenbeck analysis; meaningless: neither production *of* anything (meaning, etc) *by* anything, in the common spontaneous sense of empirical non-historical production of the spectator, as he/she is sitting in front of *a screen* . . . (in every sense).

As deconstruction-analysis is still the predominant form for so-called materialists, so-called marxists, so-called theoreticians in various journals of so-called contemporary film, some further notes on the subject: notions of deconstruction, as well as of films which 'address themselves to . . . politico-ideological practices'¹² (or whatever) still refers to the identification (to be identified with) space . . . the necessary mechanism for the subject whether identifying with him/her/itself, primarily, with unseen narrator, with character, position, story, narration, physical or psychoanalytic space of action or inaction, etcetera. We must, thus,

11 Stephen Heath, 'Repetition Time, Notes Around Structural-Materialist Film', *Wide Angle*, v2 n3. Another problem arises, of which Heath's closing in this article is emblematic: after 4,000 words to the contrary, the penultimate paragraph re-states the way *Condition of Illusion* operates, as a threat which forces repression – the re-statement is not of *Condition of Illusion's* threat, but of the (illusory) closure of, and by, the threat which Heath has been at such pains throughout to analyse differently. See my letter, *Wide Angle*, v2 n4. 'Everything ok' seems to be the need here, in contrast to Heath's usual habit of not closing up his articles with final answers when it comes to Oshima, Welles, Narrative Space, Akerman. Closed reactionary films of ideological effacement of process, contradiction, are spoken of without closure – the threat is repressed anyway in the works – and the exhumation through academic interpretation only a bare shadow of the threat implied by other work: structural/materialist film. That there's a desire *vis à vis* the signifier in structural materialist film forcing such closing-up is the only possible conclusion. Threat, Paranoia, *Answers* (sic).

12 Paul Willemen, 'Notes on Subjectivity, On Reading "Subjectivity Under Siege"' *Screen* Spring 1978, v18 n1 p 55 (up to and including footnote 13 therein).

do battle with the Brecht whom we are constantly, correctly, quoted to back up theories of suspension-before-identification, suspension-during-identification. It leads to ideas such as: distancing from the characters can come to constitute a very special kind of intimacy, which completely misunderstands/destroys the complexity and radicalness of distancing-practice. Psychological motivation, and the backtracking to points of origin imbues such arguments as well.¹³

There is also, then, the problem as to the 'breakdown' of specific signifiers and signifieds rather than of process of production of signification, thus presuming a deconstruction of specific reality through film, or a meaning that, when all is said and done, exudes from the screen (whether this is posited as dialectical or not hardly matters). The fundamental problem is this, of the final communication that is constantly being sought, with ever increasing verbal strategies of reformulation. Whether this meaning is then deconstructed somehow or other also hardly matters in terms of the operation and process of film that is being effaced. Something is not about social practice merely because it is a social practice. The production of diegesis, of the effects of a film text, is a social production; that does not relate in any way to being of necessity about the constitution of social productions. There is a fundamental difference between usage of codes, systems, theories, film processes, and the presentation of such. To mimic the modes of dominant cinema and then 'refuse' them or use them as a standard against which to measure is not necessarily any more progressive (usually less, if that's possible) than

13 (a) Attitude Theatre Company's production of Brecht's *The Measures Taken* (2 December 1978, Cockpit Theatre, London) is exemplary in this respect. Also see, on the political context and tendency of this play in 1930, Peter Horn, 'Truth is concrete: Brecht's *The Measures Taken* and the question of party discipline' in Brecht Jahrbuch, Suhrkamp 1978.

(b) 'Never in my life, except in my sleep, have I committed unconscious acts.' Karl Radek, 1937 (Moscow Trials against the Trotskyists), Prozessbericht ueber die Strafsache des Sowjetfeindlichen Trotzkestischen Zentrums, Vollstaendiger Stenographischer Bericht, Moscow 1937, p 122.

(c) 'And yet the establishing of these frameworks does not in the least weaken the striking diversity of the images that come and fit into them.' Lacan, Migault, Levi-Valensi: 'Inspired writing: Schizography', *This Quarter*, p 119, Paris, 1932.

(d) 'On the panels was developed the story corresponding to the divisions. With strange pleasure I imagined myself walking on this disc - time - space - and reading the story before me. The freedom to begin where I liked, for instance to start off from the dream in October 1946 and, having gone all the way round, to land a few months earlier in front of the objects, in front of my towel. To find the bearing of each fact on the disc meant a great deal to me. But the panels are still empty: I do not know the value of words or their relationship with each other well enough to be able to fill them in.' Alberto Giacometti, 'The Dream, The Sphynx, and The Death of T', X, London, 1959.

82 using the strategies and propaganda, the sexism and the fascism, of the ruling classes 'with a difference', 'at the edge'. 'Fascinating seductiveness and enormous voyeuristic pleasures'¹⁴ are afforded in certain interests, no matter how much *ex post facto* writing submerges this politics. Correlated to this mimicking of the modes of dominant cinema is the reintegration (or attempts at such) of narrative, in the cause of 'rich' productions which stimulate curiosity about dramatic fiction's intensity, passionate irony, and so on. This cannot be disavowed by presuming an effect which transforms, somehow inverts, the power of the system of representation, transparency', at one threshold or another of consciousness. It all seems like the sadism of the masochist: screen's juncture.

So we must get 'back' to work on the signifier and process of production, the inscribed oneness of diegesis with process of its production. And that is a social reality, if such a concept must be used to justify the obviously *political* of such work.

'By denying fulfillment, the mechanism of constant unease (in an identification into something *other*, that which is not there but phantasmed to be there for one, to be 'in'), militates *against* the repression of the time and the space "of" a painting. It militates against the repression of distance, within the picture, of its various relations, and between you and it as well. These distances cause specific, determinate effects, rather than evoking a unitary whole that could be identified into, as if the finished picture were a mere stand-in for a character or a position. This picture, thus, unlike so many others, is not an analog for some characterisation of emotions or expressivity, which is then, in its turn, a double for a person(ality), for a series of humanisations and anthropomorphisms that lend themselves to being identified *into*. The whole concept of identification is problematic, as that force which impels a movement from one's position in a social space of social meanings or a political space to and *into* a different human residence – another body or another figure – where the phantasms and fantasies, the realities of ones projections, are enacted. Such projection-into is merely the obverse of introjection, that taking into oneself of "pregiven" meanings, positions, politics from the outside (introjecting the "laws of the family", for example). The system of identification which ultimately reproduces the dominant codes of meaning and behaviour, of sex position or of other "values", is the basic support structure for the telling of the (patriarchal) story, that recurrent search for the origin of truth, the word, the law, power. Holding "oneself" in identifications and resisting breaks (whether conscious or unconscious) is precisely

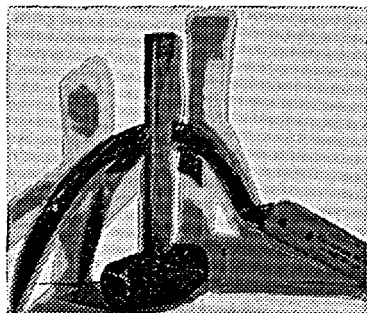
14 Willemsen, *Max Ophuls*, National Film Theatre Programme Booklet, September 1978.

the apparatus of dominance, in which most cultural production operates (*and* some operates on it and some against it). Thus the mechanism of producing constant unease in identification, of allowing no secure place for such, and of inculcated resistances and breaks, is at least an attempt at impossibility or an antagonism. The next step, of course, is to produce anti and non-identificatory works, combating the structure of identification as a "necessary" system.¹⁵ Here the viewer is always in relation to a difficult text, in attempting to grasp the cause of its effects. But those causes are always outside, they are never given in clarity, even in their absence, and are not even closely opaque, because the picture is a mechanism which propels the viewer into an analytical transformation that disallows an easy, mechanistic, reading back towards a retrospectively clear evolutionary beginning. Beginning is instead a denied, abrogated, final causality. The individual creator is absented from (this) text, which is then, like history, "a process without a subject" (Althusser). It is important to grasp this radical anti-humanism . . .¹⁶

Realism itself could be invoked. An attempted marxist notion of realism was sometimes spoken of by Brecht, as being that of the constructedness of artifice of internal relations, of contradictions producing consciousness (though singularly unsuccessful in most

15 Here the thrill of passionate contradiction is lost: for, distance to and resistance to the manipulations of phantasy's *ideological* level disallows that constant stirring, so loved, that pleasure/pain syndrome which oppresses (politically and otherwise). To repress the 'automatic', 'spontaneous' indulgences of sexist desire is, to repress (in unpleasure and pain) those excesses liberating only to those already in power (class-power, sex power, etcetera). Fear of loss which comes with such is also constant *threat* of loss, and paranoia is constantly re-instituted in that critical moment. There is *then* constant contradictory movement, play, dispersal, of the subject, which is a hysterical stasis: oppression. In addition, it's a bad exchange: long term pain for pain of less duration (given as enthusiasm) [note added for *Screen* article].

16 Peter Gidal, 'Some Problems "Relating to" Andy Warhol's *Still Life* 1976', *Artforum* May 1978.



Andy Warhol *Still Life* 1976 (72" x 86")

84 of his plays, Therese Giehse's readings¹⁷ are quite another matter, extraordinarily so). The term consciousness is not meant to mean consciousness as subjective or unique, but as residing obviously in individuals as *products*. The perception-training concept, which the word consciousness sometimes implies, of some theories of film practice is alien to my theory, unless any mention of effect on viewer implicitly connotes such. Of course training, pedagogy, education on codificatory modes of representation, etcetera, is necessary. The mechanistic notion of all the work being done up on screen (a displaced form, therefore, of an *it*, available, merely veiled, an 'apprehendable reality', 'pregnant') is dangerous but no less so than a concept of a pure un-ideological existential(ist) viewer who 'freely' perceives and learns from each confrontation with the screen. When I use words like 'dangerous', or 'combat', I really mean (for dangerous) misdirected, ideological-without-admission, mystificatory, idealist (even though ideological is here simplistically misused), and (for combat) 'work must be done on', 'contradictions worked through and motoring practice', etcetera. Using language isn't often (or always) easy.

An interjection from some notes of March 1974:

'One cannot, in film for example transcend the real; but also cannot transcend it then destroy it; that destruction is otherwise the destruction of an adequate representation. Thus the whole concept of adequate representation would be re-introducing itself this way.¹⁸ This thus would be to not take into account that film is not the adequate representation of anything. Positing a reality in history (allowing for associations by the viewer and/or within the film), then destroying it, would be film as metaphor rather than as material. I must (must I?) reiterate yet again that by material I do not mean a *material*: *signification* opposition. It is not a matter of "substance over signification" or "signification over substance"; it is a matter of constructedness and process, as I have tried to state and make clear since 1967.¹⁹ Yet there is a

17 'Ein Bertolt Brecht Abend' (A Bertolt Brecht Evening), mit Therese Giehse. Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft, Literarisches Archiv, 168093-4.

18 As to misunderstanding of adequate representation: 'For Marxists interested in Africa, for example, there is a particularly fascinating question related to this problematic: the exact definition of what African society was at the time of the colonial occupation . . . they [according to whom Marxism is inapplicable in Africa] fail to understand the historical process . . . they fail to understand development, taking mere snapshots from one moment of evolution. But the snapshot, although sometimes blurred, is not always inaccurate.' Ernest Mandel 'On the Nature of the Soviet State', *New Left Review* n108, March-April 1978, p 27.

19 Mick Eaton in the last issue of *Screen* misunderstands my practice in this respect. More importantly, from a theoretical standpoint, than this little misunderstanding (which happens a lot because people read

real difficulty here: obviously material is such; non-contradictoriness and therefore non-productiveness (that which is labour-denying) is inseparable from such a concept *if* it does not simultaneously mean material as intervention and artifice, *how* it functions as a construct. It would be film as symbolic (as in: symbol of), destruction of specific historical reality after symbolic positing of it, instead of positing a film-time and film-space which does not allow for an adequate-seeming representation, one in which moment-to-moment difference, simultaneous construction/deconstruction, disallows a projection into that space as real, thus an un-holding of image. The internality of that space would have to be compressed in its articulation (precisely not an articulation). It is an idealist metaphysic to imply there is the world in a film (however much however long) though to present an inadequate representation (or a reproduction never held into the terms of a representation, which amounts to the same thing,²⁰ at all times is a physis of film upon something that can *not* be though it *seems* to *be adequately* (re)constructed in the mind from the information given (constructed in the mind, with effacement of that process of construction, it always can be). The historical moment is the film-moment each moment. There is no history *in*, as opposed to *of*, a representation itself, of anything, but there is in the relations to it/through it/produced/motored effected, affected, and infected by it . . . that profilmic object that is seen in the viewfinder is not necessarily an (essentialist) metaphor, nor carrier of history, nor transcendental. It is the *specific* present,

and pick out one or two quotes still heavily laden with idealist formulation, something I've tried to remedy these last seven years) is his conflation of writing and film. 'Obviously one of the polemics of Gidal's extremely polemical piece is a rejection of the kind of analysis Sitney made of Structural film, seen in terms of consciousness . . . and to instate materialism in a dialectical rather than a mechanical sense; it is disputable whether he does in fact achieve that aim.' The article then speaks of theorisation, then of filmpractice, and then about the 'structural-materialist aesthetic' *per se*. Thus, with the best of intentions, Eaton conflates writings with film and then proves one with the other, proving neither. In addition he takes up the notion that my theorisation of duration, as well as the way duration operates in my films, 'can lead to a retreat from editing'. This is incorrect. I also hope no one by now anymore has the desire to quote my silly phrase 'watching oneself watching' which I stole from Brecht, Freud, and Mao, but shouldn't have. Same goes for 'presentation of consciousness' 'to the self' wherein was meant not a content of consciousness nor any structure of consciousness but act and process, and, additionally, not the presentation but the miserable failure of the attempted presentation. The idealistic metaphysic of the self as I posited it was not yet expunged by 1974, when I wrote *Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film* (reprinted in *Structural Film Anthology*, edited by Peter Gidal, BFI London 1976) but soon thereafter, after four year labour, since 1971. (See also footnote 7 above.)

20 Phrase added August 1978.

86 remembering the nonexistence of real presence in the Derridean definition. Nevertheless, that which is held in the viewfinder is a signifier and a carrier of signification.'

There is another problem with 'the real'. That is of the imaginary presence of the film-maker within an absent narrative referred to for example by, supposedly, the unsteady camera (opposed to the supposed objectivity of the still frame and the concomitant absence of the subject (film-maker/filmviewer) magically posited, centrally located, in a 'knowledge', full in its individualistic apprehension, and intimately conspiratorial position within the imaginary space-depth of the film. Now, increasingly, in many films and writings, that imaginary referent (the subject mentioned above) posited within the space, is propounded in a decoded form; previously 'she' or 'he' was mitigated against (though theoretically constituted as existent). These two attitudes towards the absent/present subject observer are not the only possible ones, and they are certainly the most reactionary. This is especially so when these propounded presences are inserted into, and help constitute, the 'social reality'; and one step from there and we have 'historical materialism', magically produced from what others call merely 'history', and others still, 'memory', or others still 'social reality, or fiction, filmed'. For many reasons the concept *process* has become demeaned mainly due to mechanistic and idealist formulations. It mustn't be expunged from our labour on theory (*nor from theories of labour*).

The insertion of 'social reality' by Straub/Huillet, the essentialist abstractions of *Tom Tom The Piper's Son*, the ambiguous documentary realism of *Unsere Afrikareise*, must be studied without the echoes of the search for the real. Telling stories is as old as . . . so what. Racism and sexism are not exactly inventions of individualist, romantic intellectuals and members of editorial boards and collectives. Narrative is of course enormously seductive, even more so in the guise of not being such, but that only (re)proves the dominance of certain modes which we are all presumably aware of.

'You either identify with it or it becomes the object of libido.' (Freud²¹ 2 choices). Or else: (third choice), phantasy as the one means of *replacing* object-libido (Lou-Andreas Salome's 'solution'). This must relate to a 'distrust concerning every form of enthusiasm', which has been my theoretical position since 1964, though the concrete practice of and in that *theoretical* is another matter. Wittgenstein was right about dominant cinema when he stated that film without a happy ending was a misunderstanding of film. The question remains: can non-narrative film bring this gratification, this optimistic search, this annihilation of the real

21 S Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, Hogarth Press, London 1974 p 42.

(yes, the Lacanian real) precisely which is other and certainly 87
not there for gratification. (Though it is also not other.)

The hook, if film needs it, is no more a 'hook' as in the narrative wherein resolution, etc, is needed and wanted. (These two concepts by the way, are crucially different, determining, on the one hand, the ideological and phantasy, and on the other, the material and historical. Which is not to say one is ever *in* the Lacanian symbolic and *out* of (though out of) the imaginary. No actual separability is implied in terms of mechanism, though in terms of enactment there are definite separabilities, effects). As to resolution being needed or wanted, as Patricia Mellencamp has written:

'The End spirals back to the Beginning and a series of other presumably new beginnings. By effacing the presence of the metaphor . . . those re-presentations (in dominant cinema) reproduce the subject within that construct, denying a materialist definition which accords the spectator the 'coming into presence of the Film' . . . the work, that is produced by and in it. The cover-up of classical narrative in the guise that what is being received is different, additive rather than repetitive, a concealment of the return of the same.'²²

The hook could be defined, for non-narrative film, as that which is of interest *per se* because unknown, that which one has not seen, that which is (not) other. Thus an interest in a film which does not somehow necessarily bind the subject-position into a complicity, even a supposedly fragmented, jagged, gapped and gap-filled (as in punctuation) one. Not to be bound into such a complicity would be the radical opposite of for example Barthes' supposition and seduction: 'Through the Tower [Eiffel] men exercise that great function of the imagination, which is their freedom since no history however bleak has been able to take that away from them.'²³ Here, thus, the ideological hook against non-narrative, against a practice that does not reproduce identification. And Barthes' influence goes further, and is always already there in the ready acceptance of that which is:

' . . . an oedipal pleasure, to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end, if it is true that every narrative, every unveiling of the truth, is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father . . . which would explain the solidarity of narrative forms, of family structures, of prohibition of nudity, all collected in our culture in the myth of Noah's sons covering his nakedness . . .'
and 'This is a very subtle and nearly untenable status for discourse:

²² Patricia Mellencamp, *Reflections: Mirror Mirror on the Wall*, unpublished paper delivered at Purdue Film Conference, Indiana, April 1978.

²³ Roland Barthes, 'The *Tour Eiffel*', *Via* v2, University of Pennsylvania, 1973, p 182.

88 narrative is dismantled yet the story is still readable; never have the two edges of the seam been clearer and more tenuous . . . never has the pleasure been better offered (to the reader) – if at least he [sic] appreciates controlled discontinuities, fake conformities, and indirect destructions. In addition to the success which can be here attributed to an author there is also here a pleasure of performance; the feat to sustain the mimesis of language [language imitating itself, akin to Metz's transcendental viewer identifying with him/her self] the source of immense pleasures, in a fashion so radically ambiguous (ambiguous to the root).'²⁴

This position, radically decadent, and reproductive of patriarchal hetero- and homosexual sexism 'to the root', takes us back to that battle against reproduction so abhorred by all the mothers and fathers in film theory.

To return to the question of identification. If identifying itself brings pleasure or forms or forces the viewing then it is simplistic to conceptually oppose it to identification. One attempts to identify everything, during viewing, but that does not of itself offer a validity to the project of such viewing, because although identifying is a first step towards identification, it has to be crucially separated from it, otherwise there would be nothing by definition that is non-narrative (which is a position some recently seem to be holding). The moment of identification is the moment of the establishment of illusionism, and the collapsing of the two terms is a necessary one, otherwise we have theoretical models of illusionist projection without identification, or identification as separable from illusionist space, both concepts being untenable. Knowing one is in the Odeon is of no matter: it is psychoanalytic identification we are speaking of, not the actual suspension of disbelief in a noncontradictory manner posited by some (though for some of the latter see *Driver* and *Coma*). Unbelief, the persistence of belief in the architectural Odeon qua Odeon, in simultaneous existence along with identification-structures, in no way necessarily produces some kind of contradictory 'relevant-ambiguity' stance (were such a stance conceivable). What it produces is simply (complex or not) identification, an illusionist practice within an architectonics uneffaced. This kind of 'relevant ambiguity' stance is one (another one) upon which the whole narrative structure builds its meanings. To speak of the knowledge of the Odeon would be automatically (and empirically/mechanistically) to clear a whole terrain and colonise it for 'narrative as contradictory'. In this sense, narrativisation is a detour, another manner of

24 Roland Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, London 1975, New York 1976.

attempting to repress the power of the signified and its predominance and therefore givenness in ideological narrative usages. Narrativisation consistently 'fails' to work against the reproduction of the signified, thus allowing for stasis, unity, holding, under whatever rubric. The emptying of meaning is what comes up against most resistance yet that emptying of meaning, that *making* of meaninglessness which is the construction and constructedness of signification presented, is formed from a defensive resistance against the reproduction of meaning; the latter which is the reproduction of dominant ideological meaning, the representation. This is the area where political does not mean aestheticising politics, as it does in 'avant-garde political documentaries' and in much Godard or in 'political, avant-garde documentaries'.²⁵

The desire for satisfaction in/of the full figure is the desire of the satisfaction through narrative, and no amount of 'constant slippage, constant contradiction' (metaphysically turning into some quality) within the narrative (or the narrativisational) film can efface that desire (amongst those who desire it). This is the impossible dream of those who find new radicalisms time and time again (in no time) in dominant or un-dominant narrative cinema, for whom individualism (and individualism's voice and image) cannot be finally annihilated as it must be.²⁶

'What had considerable import on my methodology was that . . . by mere accident I leafed through.'

Marx, letter to Engels.

'We don't yet know what we have to imagine, and it first has to be determined what we would call a life that corresponds to ours under the new circumstances.'

Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*²⁷

²⁵ 'Photography has come to be defined as a subcategory of nostalgia and/or art. With portraits of people, we always have the possible cliché rationale of "that's how it is" but never "how it is how it is". Thus the cliché becomes solidified, and the myth is conceived and perpetuated through that usage. The frame through which you view the image is just that, and the image just that, but the two together a difference, the crux in fact of that difference resting precisely in such pseudo-documentary's dichotomous nature, when a parallel to "nature" is attempted (constructed). That is the basis of the problematic.' P Gidal, *Several Short Notations Concerned With the Art of Photography* (*Studio International*, February 1973, London).

²⁶ In relation to a strategy of hypersubjectivity as distanciation-process, a recent publication, *Stories* (London 1977), by Jane Warrick, must be cited as important.

²⁷ L Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour* iii, 296 (p 124) Oxford 1977.

90 NOTE 1 After all, ultra-left once meant leftism, meant storming the Winter Palace before the Bolshevik Party was ready, setting up the Commune before Marx and Engels were ready (and before the correct time, but placing a meaning though not a persistent politics, that was ideologically progressive), before Marx and Engels thought it the right time or line, though full support *then*. Rosa Luxemburg's separatist women's groups, as separate but within the Communist Party, were castigated by Lenin (to Clara Zetkin, and to Inessa Armand, his feminist mistress). By ultra-leftism I mean, what Lenin castigated as 'leftism' in *'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder* (Foreign Languages Press Peking 1975) from which though, the following: 'As far as I have been able to familiarise myself with the newspapers of the 'Left' Communists and with those of the Communists in general in Germany, I find that the former have the advantage of being better able to carry on agitation among the masses than the latter. I have repeatedly observed something similar to this in the history of the Bolshevik Party, though on a smaller scale. . . . For instance, in 1907-08 the 'Left' Bolsheviks on certain occasions and in certain places carried on more successful agitation among the masses than we did. This may be partly due to the fact that at a revolutionary moment, or at a time when revolutionary recollections are still fresh, it is easier to approach the masses with tactics of 'mere' agitation (op cit p 114, footnote). A problem arises because the 'non-Left' (ie non-ultraleft, in modern prose) is usually a 'Right' Communism (op cit p 116), as exemplified in the French CP's current national-chauvinism eg with regard to the wine-produce of Spain and Portugal and those whose labour produces it: current slogan plastered around Southern France, 'Keep Them Out of the EEC with Their Cheap Wine'. This, aligned with humanism/stalinism in its moral self-congratulation, is the elitism of left and right populism alike.

'Lenin never depicted his opponents on the Left as enemies to be struck down or to be driven out of the Party. Not only did he call on them to work with him at the peak of the hierarchy, he explicitly endorsed certain points of their programme, especially the striving to proletarianise the cadres of party and state. In November 1920, for example, while accusing the members of the Workers Opposition of becoming "an opposition for the sake of opposition", Lenin admitted, somewhat in contradiction to this, that "the opposition which exists, not only in Moscow but throughout Russia, reveals many tendencies that are absolutely healthy, *necessary*, and inevitable at the time of the Party's natural (sic) growth' (M Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, London 1975).

Furthermore:

'After 1921, however, when Leftism assumed a more virulent form,

leading to actions that were all the more adventurist in that they were out of line with the general evolution of the situation in Germany, Lenin undertook a vigorous campaign against it. The Third Congress of the Comintern was the scene of a grand attack. Nevertheless, after savaging the Leftist leaders, some of whom, such as Béla Kun, were living in exile from their own countries, Lenin hastened to send them a letter in which he said, "It is quite natural for *émigrés* frequently to adopt attitudes which are 'too leftist', . . ." and expressed his sympathy with such "fine, loyal, dedicated and worthy revolutionaries." (Lenin, quoted in M Liebman, *op cit*, p 339.)

One last quote from same source:

'Lenin had just written his unsparing attack on Leftism. But then, in September 1920, the action begun by the workers of Turin at the end of August took on a wider scope, leading to the occupation of various factories. Even though these actions failed to develop further, the country did not return to normality – the crisis persisted. It was in these conditions that Lenin wrote to the Italian Communists that "in the present day conditions in Italy one should *lean to the left*. To successfully accomplish the revolution and safeguard it, the Italian party must take a definite step to the left . . .' (Lenin, quoted in Liebman *op cit* p 44).

None of the above should be seen to be an attempted validation of anarcho-adventurist Leftism which both denies mass organisation and theory.

NOTE II Such opprobrium is not to imply that *any* one is outside sexism, although the status as oppressor is not the same 'status' as oppressed. Nevertheless, overt and unquestioned reproduction of sexist ideology is not the same as work against it. Similarly with racism and capitalism. Using polemics to such an extent reproduces that which you're ostensibly criticising because it makes it so impossible to reach that goal that it can be dismissed as idealistic, allowing one to never take a stand, to deny the political, avoiding thereby any problematisation. Similarly, constant problematisation or 'working through' is not such if not accompanied by a political stand against (dominant) ideological mode, an antagonism (though all this nevertheless takes place in ideology, one is never outside).

I agree with Judith Williamson's position in its specificity:

' . . . supporting Laura Mulvey as an independent film-maker, which I do, is quite different from "agreeing with" her film. *Riddles of the Sphinx*'s very title suggests the sort of Mystery of Woman which is precisely a *male* view of women. This mysteriousness is set up in the "stones" section with blurry shots of the Sphinx accompanied by electronic music: it almost has the aura of a Turkish Delight

92 advertisement, "full of Eastern Promise". This use of the Sphinx can be seen as part of a strategy intended to evoke mystery and an image of inscrutable womanhood, as a preliminary to their "deconstruction" with the later role of the Sphinx as a speaking subject: "she" is given a voice. But this involves a fundamental misconception: you don't dispel a myth by trying to make it speak, or reject an image by giving it a voice with which to deny itself. The film undercuts its own strategy, by not recognising that the power of an image of Female Mystery is so strong that it functions in the most traditional way and is *too strong to be undercut by anything later in the film* – even if this were intended.

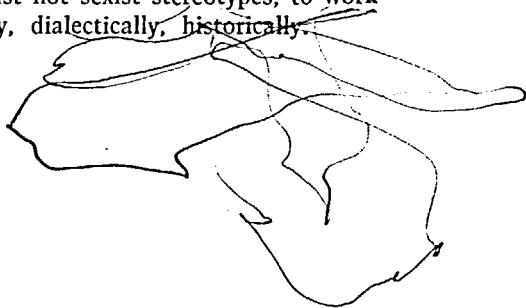
The Sphinx on the screen traverses time and space to imply that there are eternal qualities of women . . . the necessity that women *ask* the questions becomes confused with the idea that women *are* the question. The Sphinx's riddle is herself. "*She*" is the eternal puzzle, unable to question actual oppression because, like real women, "she" is not located socially but removed from history and used as a symbol, *something women have had enough of*. To assume that such a symbol "does not have a meaning but does have meaning within the shifting contexts set up for it by the film's discourse" and to see the text as only "producing meanings" ignores the dangers of *re-using*, *re-presenting* existing social meanings.' Judith Williamson, *Two or Three Things We Know About Ourselves: A Critique of Riddles of the Sphinx and Three Women* (unpublished, London, 1977).

The makers of *Riddles* seem to think that aiming, or swivelling, a camera at someone talking rather generally and simply about housework is 'dealing with the signified, problematising it', housework and its meanings (or, even, problematising the relation of signifier to signified). Supposedly problematising the signified without specific political context is formalism at its most decadent. For films, nevertheless, which persist in *not* learning that the ideological position of the representation is overdetermining, the *signifier*, the *signified*, and the relation of the two, would have to be problematised, inasmuch as this is possible. Leaving the means of representation, ie the *filmic* articulation, *un-problematized*, for example, in Godard/Gorin's *Letter to Jane*, whilst maintaining the myth of 'working on the signified' (the photograph from Vietnam, in this case) sets the theoretical table for socialist realism/capitalist realism. In the *practice of film* problematising the filmic articulatory mechanisms, the means of representation, the technique, is necessary to effect a problematisation of the signified. Nevertheless, the privileging of the signified has a history so broad that an opportunistic film will find immediate 'spontaneous' space in the dominant ideology's academic subsector, the resuscitators of Welles, Sirk, Hitchcock, Ford, etcetera.

Thus: either the playing around of decadent formalism and

keeping 'open' possible political positions and meanings, or capitalist realism, held in to (or by) the representation's overdetermination, therefore reproducing dominant ideology's dominant mode, dominant meaning(s). It is an idealism, a voluntarism, to assume the photographic signified ('the aesthetics and politics of the photographic signified') can be always and necessarily problematised; transhistoricism asserts itself here, the way it similarly does in Wollen/Mulvey's latest script referring to a woman's menstrual period as 'the usual feminine problem', thereby overdetermining through that specificity, at this conjuncture, any possible stylistic or 'anti-code' manner of its imagined filmic representation, unless concepts like deconstruction and irony remain in force. What I'm saying politically is that if one holds, though I do not, that it is possible to problematise *any* image or referent then at least one should use politically left-wing rather than right-wing models, antisexist not sexist stereotypes, to work through productively, materially, dialectically, ~~historically~~.

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Afterword

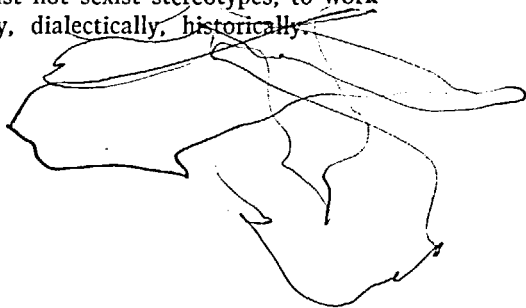
'The argument is for truly materialist practice which is one of the presentation ie demystification of the material construction of film, a dialectically constituted "presentation", of film representation, film image, film moment, film meaning in temporalness, etcetera.'¹

That argument has been made by Gidal in films and writings over a number of years and has received a certain amount of discussion in *Screen* in articles by Brewster, Dusinberre, Eaton and Rees: the first reviewing the *Structural Film Anthology* edited by Gidal to accompany a National Film Theatre retrospective in 1976, the second concerned with problems of subjectivity in the development of Gidal's work, the third and fourth with the context of

¹ Peter Gidal, 'Further Footnotes', unpublished paper delivered at the London Film-makers Co-op, February 1976.

keeping 'open' possible political positions and meanings, or capitalist realism, held in to (or by) the representation's overdetermination, therefore reproducing dominant ideology's dominant mode, dominant meaning(s). It is an idealism, a voluntarism, to assume the photographic signified ('the aesthetics and politics of the photographic signified') can be always and necessarily problematised; transhistoricism asserts itself here, the way it similarly does in Wollen/Mulvey's latest script referring to a woman's menstrual period as 'the usual feminine problem', thereby overdetermining through that specificity, at this conjuncture, any possible stylistic or 'anti-code' manner of its imagined filmic representation, unless concepts like deconstruction and irony remain in force. What I'm saying politically is that if one holds, though I do not, that it is possible to problematise *any* image or referent then at least one should use politically left-wing rather than right-wing models, antisexist not sexist stereotypes, to work through productively, materially, dialectically, ~~historically~~.

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'The argument is for truly materialist practice which is one of the presentation ie demystification of the material construction of film, a dialectically constituted "presentation", of film representation, film image, film moment, film meaning in temporalness, etcetera.'¹

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94 that work and its specific strategies.² The publication now of this piece by Gidal himself, 'The Anti-Narrative', written in 1976 and revised in 1978, is not simply a continuation of that discussion – and not at all a discontinuation of the elements of criticism produced by those previous articles – but also the possibility of a more direct access to and thus a more direct engagement with a position, strongly held and articulated, that has had its importance in contemporary debate around questions of strategy in independent film-making practice and that cuts across many concerns that have been and are central to the work of *Screen*. This 'afterword' is no more than a series of brief remarks, 'further footnotes' in connection with one or two points arising.³

There is for Gidal a radical impossibility: *the history of cinema*. The fundamental criticism made of everyone from the Berwick Street Collective to Akerman, Oshima to LeGrice (even LeGrice), is that their films are part of that history, return its representation, that they are in that cinema, repeat its implications. Strategies of deconstruction are merely a further turn of involvement: deconstruction repeats – gives currency once more to and looks into – the terms, the images it seeks to displace, is a continuing and reactionary reproduction of cinema. And cinema is not available here for another – alternative – history. It is inconceivable that Gidal could write a book such as LeGrice's *Abstract Film and Beyond*, the different, hidden, outside-the-industry, independent history. Not just because of the theoretical and political refusal of any grounding in ideas of art and developing artistic experimentation, but also because of the difficulty of 'independence' and 'history': there is always in Gidal's writing the tension of an acute actuality, the pressure of – *for* – a break now, exactly the constantly current *impossibility*.

It is this that Gidal qualifies as his 'ultraleftism' ('so-called ultraleftism') and that gives his habitual mode of assertion from a position occupied as being, occupied to *be*, the extreme – almost all films are to be described as 'reactionary', if not 'facistic' – and his habitual adjudicatory isolation – radical feminists alone are possible allies, though even then 'problematically'. The way may be 'distrust concerning every form of enthusiasm' but that, as

2 Ben Brewster, 'Structural Film Anthology', *Screen* Winter 1976/7, v17 n4, pp 117-120; Deke Dusinberre, 'Consistent Oxymoron – Peter Gidal's Rhetorical Strategy', *Screen* Summer 1977, v18 n2, pp 79-88; Al Rees, 'Conditions of Illusionism', *Screen* Autumn 1977, v18 n3, pp 41-54; Mick Eaton, 'The Avant-garde and Narrative', *Screen* Summer 1978, v19 n2, pp 129-134. A context for these articles, and to which a number of them explicitly refer, was provided by Peter Wollen's '“Ontology” and “Materialism” in Film', *Screen* Spring 1976, v17 n1, pp7-23.

3 These remarks also follow on from the discussion in an article to which Gidal here refers: Stephen Heath, 'Repetition-time: Notes around “Structural/Materialist” Film', *Wide Angle* v2 n3, 1978, pp.4-11.

Gidal himself often seems to recognise, can quickly become a generally disorganised and individual pessimism, a strictly contemplative performance.⁴ 95

As far as the theory and the film-making practice are concerned, the consequences of this position are, in fact, complex, contradictory. If the history of cinema is radically impossible, two courses seem open: either the end of cinema as the straight refusal to make films and so repeat its terms or the end of cinema *in* films, a work in, on, through film, the 'truly materialist practice' as Gidal defines it. Such a practice, which is the course decided by Gidal, is then necessarily the fully reflexive knowledge of the history of cinema that at any moment a film – a materialist film – must hold and present, 'a dialectically constituted "presentation", of film representation, film image, film moment, film meaning in temporality, etcetera'. The film must be the event of that material presentation ('the historical moment is the film moment each moment'), the only way to end the implications of cinema, the place-image, identification, narrative-sign, illusion – of the spectator there.

Two remarks immediately in this context. First, it has to be noted that this presentation of film representation works in practice across a division or duality of strategies as with regard to signifier and signified (these terms with the idea of separation, one against the other, as used by Gidal): on the one hand, presentation of elements in and through the film; on the other, elimination of elements from the presentation – for example, images of human figures, with the stress in the theoretical statements on the elimination of images of women (human figures do occur in films by Gidal, sometimes quite centrally as in the 1970 *Takes* with its

4 Thinking of surrealism and the political situation of the avant-garde, Benjamin talked of the need to *organise* pessimism: 'To organise pessimism means nothing other than to expel moral metaphor from politics and to discover in political action a sphere reserved one hundred per cent for images. This image sphere, however, can no longer be measured out by contemplation. If it is the double task of the revolutionary intelligentsia to overthrow the intellectual predominance of the bourgeoisie and to make contact with the proletarian masses, the intelligentsia has failed almost entirely in the second part of this task because it can no longer be performed contemplatively . . . In reality it is far less a matter of making the artist of bourgeois origin into a master of "proletarian art" than of deploying him, even at the expense of his artistic activity, at important points in this sphere of imagery.' Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism', *Reflections*, New York 1979, p 191. Gidal's writing runs across ideas in this passage which in turn has questions for that writing and its various formulations. The problem of the deployment of the artist, even at the expense of his or her artistic activity, against the unity-illusion of an assumed progressive relation (Benjamin's 'metaphor') and towards a critically produced knowledge in the contradictions of the reality of representation and its institutions (Benjamin's 'sphere of imagery') is the problem of, together, Gidal's theory, his films, his practice and situation as an artist.

96 use of an erotic image of a woman in its film account of cinema-voyeurism, but there is a whole run of his films, including most notably *Room Film 1973*, *Condition of Illusion* and *Silent Partner*, and in respect of which the theoretical writing seems particularly to have been developed, where the absence is more or less complete – more in *Room Film 1973* and *Condition of Illusion*, less in *Silent Partner* which introduces shots of legs). Second, the relation between the theoretical – theoretical-polemical – writing and the films should not be taken for granted: the films are different from the writing, the theory, that accompanies them and that difference is not – contrary to one or two of Gidal's own comments – their failing but their advance; this is not because of some notion of 'the artist' being automatically, romantically in advance of 'the theorist' but because, simply, the effects and constructions of the films cannot be flattened into the reductive position of the theory which, indeed, at many points they challenge in the very monotony – the undialectical nature – of its usual argument.

'There is no film which *subverts* the real . . . that which is, the material real, is only subvertable by another material real, not by any material image of a material real.'⁵ The same emphasis is made and extended in 'The Anti-Narrative': contemporary social formations cannot be adequately given through cinema; there is no dialectical portrayal, operation upon and through in cinema in relation to social practice of the extra-cinematic. In part, this is a position against certain idealist conceptions of the political importance and effectivity of cinema and film: film is important but unimportant, and a political practice – a political study for that matter – of cinema is so only in posing constantly, and against itself, the terms of that recognition (the movement and perspective and action of that 'but'). In part too, however, it is the argument against 'work on the signified (and "work on the signifier")' for a specific practice of film, of film specifically, where 'specific' – 'specifically' involves, as the very condition of 'an unrecuperated avant-garde', film kept out of meaning and representation, free from all illusions – 'the process is the film'.

The problem of all this can be grasped in the idea of a production of meaninglessness: 'the attempt at meaninglessness . . . the nongiveness of meaning'. Gidal's formulations are difficult here and confusing in that difficulty and then themselves confused, several possible positions (and there is a defensive edginess that emerges in the need felt to disclaim positions which are clearly recognised as perhaps implied – 'none of the above to imply autonomy to (a) discourse'). The terms of the making of meaninglessness for which Gidal argues are not so far from those of

⁵ Peter Gidal, 'Technology and Ideology in/through/and Avant-Garde Film: An Instance', in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath eds, *The Cinematic Apparatus* (in press).

deconstruction – ‘the emptying of meaning’, ‘the undermining of meaning’ – and the effective distinction of the two would depend on a far more developed account of the operation of this ‘making’ than Gidal gives. In the absence of which account, meaninglessness is both entangled with deconstruction and, which defines it as being different from deconstruction according to Gidal’s argument, with the reiterated attack on representation and, ideally, reproduction, ‘that battle against reproduction’: ‘a defensive resistance against the reproduction of meaning; that latter which is the reproduction of dominant ideological meaning, the representation.’ Though Gidal would not accept this, it appears in the difficulty and confusion that one position implied would involve something like the notion of an abstraction of the given as the production of a work outside meaning and hence the ideological: ‘the undermining of determinate meaning, the latter being as always and necessarily ideologically produced and arbitrary’. What exactly would an indeterminate or non-determinate meaning be? (Does ‘determinate’ here mean simply a particular meaning? The elision of the question of specific historical meanings into a question of meaning in general is part of the difficulty). What exactly would be at stake in a non-arbitrary meaning? (In what sense, moreover, is a determinate and ideologically produced meaning arbitrary? In one crucial sense at least, it is quite the reverse that has to be stressed; historical materialism indeed is the science of the non-arbitrariness of the given, including meaning(s)). And this is to leave aside that ‘*film-as-projected*, as anti-illusionist’ and the ‘making of meaninglessness’ are not one and the same thing or necessary concomitants with the latter the condition of the former (for Gidal ‘meaning’ and ‘illusion’ seem to function synonymously in a totally un-Brechtian manner) and that, precisely, Gidal’s films are in meaning, crossed by meanings – those of the history of cinema they inevitably and critically engage included – and productive of meanings, not least the complex meaning of their, of that engagement.

In a way, the confusion is exactly a result of what Gidal calls his ultraleftism and which might better be seen as an absence at many points in his writings of historical and dialectical thinking. The critique of deconstruction⁶ is right but no justification for a

6 Ironically but symptomatically critique of deconstruction in *Screen* has on occasion involved simultaneous and explicit critique of Gidal’s theoretical account of ‘structural/materialist film’: ‘Deconstruction is quickly the impasse of a formal device, an aesthetic of transgression when the need is an activity of transformation, and a politically consequent materialism in film is not to be expressed as veering contact past internal content in order to proceed with “film as film” . . .’ ‘Narrative Space’, *Screen* Autumn 1976, v17 n3, p 108 (for the ‘proceeding-with-“film-as-film”’ formulation, see Peter Gidal, ‘Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film’, *Structural Film Anthology*, London 1976, p 2).

98 monolithic argument against all and every work engaging contemporary terms of representation and their production. Since a film is never in itself *simply* radical, it is right and necessary to locate and critique the elements of its construction in ideological reproduction but this is again no justification for a monolithic argument in which all films become indiscriminately and uniformly 'reactionary' and which avoids any consideration of the historical reality of the contradictions a film may represent *and decisively produce* (as does *Riddles of the Sphinx*, which is its real difficulty and its political use value, the latter itself with contradictory effects to be grasped at each stage of the continuing history of the film's situation).⁷

Evidently, the work of *Screen* differs sharply with Gidal as to the possibility and the value of 'production of meaninglessness': there is a necessary – and inevitable – struggle in representation and the relations of representing of men and women as subjects given in those relations, which struggle is what is easily 'forgotten', *theoretically* avoided, by the notion of minimalising potency of signification in order to allow for attention to the film's process as such, 'its' construction. To say that 'we must get "back" to work on the signifier and process of production, the inscribed oneness of diegesis with process (relations) of its production' is not only still a problem of representation – *inscribed oneness* – but is equally, and precisely in its belief in a simply filmic solution of that problem – *work on the signifier* – an elision of the real process of a film in a way that does not support the assertion of 'the obviously *political* of such a work'. 'Representation of meaning *means*: repressing the coming into being of meaning';⁸ as against which, as something of its dialectical relocation, would have to be added, however, in order to grasp what is then at stake, that 'film as film' means repressing the fact of the social existence and heterogeneity of film: film is not film – has any materialist account ever proceeded by tautology? – but, always and every time, a specific social production, which real process of a film includes the conditions of its construction and presence (the audience, for example, and despite Gidal's 'somehow the audience mustn't be mentioned'), never reducible to 'inscribed oneness' or 'work on the signifier'. It is *thus*, moreover, and without in any way falling into some indulgent idealism of its effectivity, that film is a site of social practice and intervention; that something is to be done and – constantly, contradictorily – to be gained there, in and against its institution, its cinema. Gidal's films after all, are about *that*.

'I vehemently want to aim the camera at something and work

⁷ As context for this description of *Riddles of the Sphinx*, see 'Difference', *Screen* Autumn 1978, v19 n3, especially pp 73-74, 76, 98-99.

⁸ 'Further Footnotes', *op cit*.

through with it on representation.⁹ In fact, of course, Gidal's work 99
is in representation. The argument against representation –
perfectly idealist as such, the question is not one of 'arguing
against representation' but of transforming specific institutions
and practices, specific terms and relations of representation – is
accompanied by an argument for, effectively, a more complex
engagement with representation. What is important for this latter
argument is a critique – the practical critique made by the films
(sometimes described by Gidal as 'the distance between know-
ledge and perception') – of existing holds of identity and identi-
fication, of their whole contract of seduction, of this cinema of
reproduction. (Elsewhere, 'reproduction' tends to become another
generally abstract term, taken up in the battle 'against reproduction
in any form' which is not helped by a quotation from Maynard
Smith's *The Evolution of Sex* that does not, contrary to what is
claimed, say anything about not-reproducing and so support that
as 'a viable theoretical position'). Gidal's films use materials of
reproduction, reproduce, are the site of relations of representation,
represent; the work is in the transformation they realise, the
new situation they reproduce: 'setting up a contradictory repre-
sentation: holding and not holding a series of reproductions into
(the) terms of (a) representation.'¹⁰

These few remarks have been made simply as an initial response
to the writing and arguments of Gidal's theory of which 'The Anti-
Narrative' is an extended example. None of the points made cannot
be found in 'The Anti-Narrative' itself. Part of what remains over
from them there is the kind of difficulty and confusion here men-
tioned; part again, however, is a complex development of the
problems and contradictions of these points in theory and in
practice, a development which these present remarks have largely
curtailed and which is the final use of Gidal's paper here in *Screen*.

STEPHEN HEATH

9 Peter Gidal, 'Talk at Millennium', *Millennium Film Journal* v1 n2, 1978, p 20.

10 'Technology and Ideology in/through/and Avant-Garde Film: An Instance, op cit.

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Felix Thompson

Notes on Reading of Avant-Garde Films

Trapline, Syntax

I

Consider Ellie Epp's *Trapline*, a film made in 1976. It is composed of a series of discrete fixed shots within a swimming pool. These shots are interspersed with black leader. The soundtrack contains ambient noise consistent with a swimming pool: splashings, lappings and muffled shouts, the sound of running water. This accompanies both image and leader. Some of the shots include in order: the title over swimmers' feet standing at the end of the pool/reflections on the still surface of the water, with, in one case, the lines of the glass roof's frame laid across the turquoise brick pattern of the bottom of the pool/in motion the water's undulations distort the brick pattern into sympathetic curves/boy swimmers cross the frame and back in the choppy waters/a shot of the glass roof, source of the reflected image – a plant is growing absurdly in the angle of the frame/the changing cubicles with small mirrors which reflect swimmers in the pool/next to the cubicles a worn staircase with the varnish coming off its wooden steps – at the bottom of the frame, which cuts off at the water's edge, splashes from invisible swimmers/the swimmers out of the pool, pink and indistinct, not in the centre of the frame, against blue tiles.

Immediately, perhaps, the spectator will begin to work against the apparent arbitrariness of such a succession of images, will feel impelled to establish a position for comprehension. This kind of activity on the part of the spectator is frequently associated in critical discourse with avant-garde cinema, in formulations such as the 'need for constant reflexiveness', or 'open-endedness' in the film's structure: 'The perceiver, rather than the artist, is made responsible for the production of meaning . . .'.¹ But although the

1 Al Rees, 'Conditions of Illusionism', *Screen* v18 n3, p49.

102 images on their own are shorn of the sure matrix of meaning across which a conventional narrative film can move a spectator, the activity allowed to the spectator does not amount to a complete freedom of interpretation. *Trapline* as a succession of arbitrary images intersects with the 'wider' practices of the avant-garde, that is to say that *Trapline* will be surrounded by polemic, debate, theory and criticism while being exhibited in circumstances which are rather different from those of dominant cinema. It is the effects of these practices on the positions available to spectators in relation to *Trapline* that I wish to examine. Will differences in these practices result in a variety of spectator positions, a variety of interpretations of the film? To what extent is the meaning produced by practices 'external' to the film?

One source of such differences within the avant-garde derives from the terms in which its practices are conceived as oppositional to those of dominant cinema. This can take the form of a complete rejection of dominant cinema in an extreme gesture towards aesthetic autonomy. Or it can take the form of direct engagement with the practices of dominant cinema, an attempt to challenge and change 'from within'. An example of what critical discourse has described as the aspiration for complete autonomy has been described by Deke Dusinberre as 'the English project of "purifying" cinematic signification'.² Here autonomy is exemplified by a 'complete rejection' of narrativity. This is attempted by questioning the very illusionism of the image through which the narrative might unfold. Narrative is to be completely displaced by a concentration on the image track in such a way as to 'subordinate image content to image production'. The inherent linearity or successiveness of the 'pure' signifying substance of film is foregrounded. As a result the films described by Dusinberre are said to employ a 'literalness' 'which denies an ending which can be predicted or construed as a goal'; or which presents the 'content' of the film as an index of filmic duration rather than the other way round.

How will *Trapline* be read within these terms of reference? Clearly it is a film which concentrates on the image track. The concatenation of events in the film into narrative or towards a goal seems somewhat undeveloped. This could lead to the judgement that the film is literally about what can be seen in its fixed frames, about the sum of its referents. These referents cannot be connected by any significant causal relations, save for those suggested by the banal knowledge of swimming pools that the spectator brings to the film. *Trapline* does not attempt to question the status of its images. Referentiality of the image appears to exist for its own sake, not to be turned back reflexively to index

2 Deke Dusinberre, 'St George in the Forest: The English Avant-Garde', *Afterimage* n6.

the process of production of the illusion (as in the landscape films described by Dusiñberre).³ Instead of experiencing the 'pure' time of filmic duration we are presented with a diegetic circle of events involved in 'going for a swim' – from the edge of the pool to the water and back to the edge of the pool. The untroubled images of *Trapline*, the simple circle of its events are sufficiently laden with resistant detail to invite the spectator to search for a 'higher' meaning in the film. What can be made of the inclusion of the boy swimmers, of the overlaid patterns in the water, of the plant growing in the angle of the roof or the worn-ness of the wooden steps? *Trapline* read within the terms of this programme for 'purifying' cinematic signification is seen primarily as a film which is still susceptible to narrative interpretations even though the grounds for such interpretations are not explicitly present within the film.

As I have noted, however, both *Trapline* and the films which can be said to try to reject the slightest trace of narrative to achieve the 'truly cinematic', concentrate on the image track. This concern with the purely visual elements in cinema may be connected to the significant role that fine art, particularly painting, has played in the development of the avant-garde. Dusiñberre⁴ suggests that the reflexive concerns of the structural film in America coincided with a more general interest in the reflexivity of art developed by art schools in this country. And, in their article 'The Avant-Garde, Histories and Theories' Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom both argue for a connection between formalist American cinema and what they term the 'art world', as opposed to art house cinema or Hollywood:

The avant-garde cinema is almost always seen – especially by its own historians – in terms of a development completely separate from that of the history of cinema. It is seen in terms of the 'art world' (painting, poetry, sometimes architecture) rather than the 'entertainment industry'.⁵

The sense of 'otherness' that this connection gives to the avant-garde in relation to dominant cinema is particularly important in the context of the concern with the phenomenology of vision which Bergstrom and Penley both point to in the American avant-garde. Penley suggests that 'Cinema replays unconscious wishes the structures of which are shared by phenomenology: the illusion of perceptual mastery with the effect of the creation of a transcendental subject'.⁶ But it is necessary to take account of the differences of inflection of this phenomenology of vision between

3 Dusiñberre, op cit.

4 Dusiñberre, op cit.

5 Janet Bergstrom, in Bergstrom and Penley, 'The Avant-Garde: Histories and Theories', *Screen* Autumn 1978 v19 n3, p120.

6 Constance Penley, in Bergstrom and Penley, op cit, p178.

104 dominant narrative cinema and Bergstrom's 'art world'. If the terms of a narrative reading are set aside, how does *Trapline* relate to this phenomenology of vision?

Trapline can implicate the spectator in a play on what is seen and what is not seen, a play with the 'pure act of perception' that Metz argues is at the centre of the processes of identification with the cinematic apparatus.⁷ The film redoubles the play of water in its fixed shots by the very operation of the immobile frame against the movement of the water, and by playing the sound of moving water against its presence/absence in the image band. The black leader also acts as a frame and, with the help of some indeterminacy and diffuseness of the soundtrack, the constant return to framing acts against any horizontal or narrative development (which is not to say that the film actually prevents them being read in). Stephen Heath has argued that framing is a fundamental part of cinema:

'Framing, determining and laying out the frame is quickly seen as a fundamental cinematic act, the moment of the very "rightness" of the image: "framing, that is to say, bringing the image to the place it must occupy", a definition taken from a manual for teachers written in the 1920s. Quickly too, and in consequence, it becomes the object of an aesthetic attention concerned to pose decisively the problems of composition of the frame, of what Eisenstein calls "*mise en cadre*".'⁸

A compositional problem is presented in the cinema however by the need to contain movement within the frame. Heath argues that it is precisely the work of narrative to contain such movement so that 'space becomes place – narrative as the taking place of film'. Though where narrative has been set aside, and the spectator is content to be caught up in the play on the edges of the static frame, more general questions of spatial relations between shots become redundant. From this point of view the framing of the film plays on what is beyond its edges without in any way trying to contain what is beyond within a narrative framework. For instance the reflection of the roof in the still water is so clear that there is little sense of revelation or narrative development in the subsequent shot of its source. We already know the source of the splashes at the bottom of the frame in one of the later shots – the splashes are a specific play on the immobility of the frame which refuses to encompass their source. Heath quotes Metz: 'the rectangular screen permits every type of fetishism, all the effects of "just before" since it places at exactly the height

7 Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen* Summer 1975, v16 n2 p51.

8 Stephen Heath, 'Narrative Space', *Screen* Autumn 1976, v17 n3 p82.

it wants the sharp vibrant bar which stops the seen . . .'.⁹ In 105 asserting the pleasure of 'just beyond' *Trapline* remains static in time rather than suggesting the temporal movement of Metz's 'just before'. In this respect its strategies appear to reproduce the immovable frame of painting.

The way in which the spectator begins to work in relation to *Trapline* will vary just as the terms of reading of the avant-garde vary. If the terms are those held within recent English avant-garde practice, the film may be judged susceptible of narrative readings. But within practices of reading apposite to painting, narrative possibilities may not be relevant. This is not to say that *Trapline* offers a challenge to dominant forms of reading. Rather it exploits a homology in the practices of reading of dominant cinema and painting in the use of the frame, a homology which is explicated by Heath in terms of historical developments from Renaissance perspective. The 'illusion of perceptual mastery' remarked upon by Constance Penley is exactly something that Heath describes in the development of the frame in painting – 'the fascination with the rectangle of tamed light, the luminously defined space of vision'.¹⁰ Though *Trapline* shows the kind of fetishism around a 'primary identification' with perception which Metz has argued is a central characteristic of the filmic apparatus, an apparatus developed primarily for narrative, it is possible to separate the act of framing from narrativisation because of the film's rudimentary syntagmatic development. This separation may be exploited in exhibition contexts depending on whether deciphering narrative is a relevant practice in that context.

II

As I have already mentioned, the terms of an opposition of avant-garde to dominant cinema can take the form of a more direct engagement with dominant practices. In *Syntax*, an American film made by Martha Haslanger in 1974, there is a deliberate attempt to confront the spectator with the processes of identification with the cinematic apparatus and narrativisation. The 'innocence' of perception is immediately brought into crisis by placing writing and image in contest for the spectator's attention. The process of reading images is challenged by a series of shots of a room in which articles are briefly described by flashed-up titles, but the relevant articles are only coincidentally in the corresponding shot. In some cases the articles are in preceding shots, and in others we 'find' the articles later on. The 'game' of finding the articles is frustrated by the picture fading before the spectator can read both words and images, and by the fact that both titles and relevant objects will appear in different parts of the screen. The work expended in searching the frame is thus due to a willingness to

⁹ Heath, op cit p83.

¹⁰ Heath, op cit.

106 highlight the polysemic possibilities of the whole image. But *Syntax* is more than formal experimentation with the matters of expression of film. As the spectator becomes accustomed to the strategies of the film, the full implication of the descriptiveness of the words and images becomes more vital. The spectator is specifically implicated in narrativisation across the fragmentation of different shot angles of the room, and diversity of described articles, by two features over and above the desire to grasp for meaning. The first of these features is an ominous ticking on the soundtrack. The second is that some of the shots zoom in slightly as if to give the spectator a better look so that the fragments can be pieced together. If we follow the progress of the film through the development of attention to the titles – we are aware immediately of the process of reading reflexively when the white titles start by naming themselves as ‘white words’; then follows the process of looking for the articles named in the descriptions; and gradually we take in the elaborateness of the descriptions – ‘the picture of the girl could be anyone’ – the seating capacity of the table – descriptions of spatial relationships within the room – a story about a ukulele. At this point when we think we might be able to piece the room together the titles turn to itemise the sound of ticking, the phonetics of ‘room’, and ‘Silence’. Having thus returned the spectator to pure reflexiveness a new ‘scene’ is commenced. This second section of the film is based around shots of a man seated at a table of what might be a café on the edge of a square. One angle shows the man against the street, and another, from over the shoulder, shows a notebook open on the table in front of him. There is considerable alternation between these shot positions. In this second section there is speech on the soundtrack which gradually becomes distinct. As it does so words and sentences are picked out by titles. Initially the speech appears to be a conversation involving both male and female voices. These are sufficiently allusive for the spectator to resume the process of constructing a narrative. One quote in particular at the end concerns the urgency and importance of memory. This is repeated several times by a male voice.

Syntax proceeds then by dismantling and reassembling the unity of matters of expression that underpins dominant cinema. Memory in particular is tested by the barrage of titles and images, potential narrative fragments that we grasp in retrospect to make sense of the film. The appearance of ‘a character’ should not be surprising in the context of dismantling narrative. We have to write the meaning of the character in with the same kind of effort of comprehension that has been necessary from the very beginning. Is the man/character writing in the notebook or are we? This is really a question the film invites, requiring an awareness in the spectator of the work necessary to produce meaning in the film, awareness of complicity in narrativisation. However it also invites the

possibility of a slippage between the reflexivity of consciousness of the spectator and that of the character, thereby centring the film upon the consciousness of the seated man. In fact the possibility that the fragmentary nature of the film might be subsumed within the consciousness of the man/character is reinforced by the statements of the male voice about memory which can be considered as thoughts of the man we are looking at. This is because the disintegrated syntax of narrative film can be read as the *mise-en-scène* of the disordered flow of a character's consciousness, as in for instance Hollywood dream sequences; or, as in art-house cinema, as the vehicle for the point of view of an author through the complex consciousness of a character. Recently John Ellis has argued: 'Any work on the signifying processes of film is open to a constitution within the discourse of "quality film" criticism in these terms: it is "an experience", which is "direct"; its "meaning" is something that has to be puzzled over'.¹¹ The will to puzzle towards this 'meaning' especially when it is located in the author as punctual source has been thoroughly promoted by the kind of criticism that Ellis describes, and is no doubt thoroughly entrenched by practices of literary criticism anyway. *Syntax* can work to disperse the centred subject position of the spectator if there is a recognition that the processes of narrative are being dismembered. But terms of reading exist which can work against even these most extreme forms of fragmentation to establish a coherent subject position. There are obstacles, however, to placing *Syntax* unquestioningly within the discourses of 'art house' cinema. These include the obstacles to reading which make it difficult to grasp the film in one showing; and the fact that so much of the concern with signifying practice in the film is at the level of its matters of expression – writing, image and sound.

III

In concentrating on possible terms of reading of *Trapline* and *Syntax* it has I hope become clear that these terms have a crucial effect on the positioning of the spectator. Indeed the very variation of these terms of reading makes evident the diversity of sites in which the avant-garde can operate. There is, however, a general tendency to privilege two related terms in reading avant-garde films: questions of the oppositional status of avant-garde practices, and of narrative. It was partly to clarify debates about this oppositional status that led Peter Wollen to describe two avant-gardes with differing targets and strategies in his influential article 'The Two Avant-gardes'.¹² Yet in its turn the idea of two avant-

¹¹ John Ellis, 'Art, Culture and Quality – Terms for a Cinema in the Forties and Seventies', *Screen* Autumn 1978, v19 n3, p46.

¹² Peter Wollen, 'The Two Avant-Gardes', *Edinburgh '76 Magazine*.

108 gardes has been questioned. In an editorial of *Afterimage* it is claimed that 'the simple opposition of two avant-garde traditions is no longer an adequate model – indeed the posing of that model may have had its own effect'.¹³ While more films are being produced that cannot easily be placed in either tradition described by Wollen it is clear that narrative is still a troubling feature of discussion. If Wollen's article did have 'its own effect', it was that it inscribed narrative centrally between two avant-gardes without really confronting it as an issue. Wollen was, of course, doing no more than adopt the terms of a current debate but he effectively installed narrative as a measure of a 'creeping' convergence of avant-gardes and perpetuated it as a source of polemical disagreement. Wollen himself gave impetus to the measuring of convergence in his discussion of the introduction of narrative into the work of LeGrice in such films as *After Manet*.¹⁴ On the other hand the use of narrative has also continued as the measure of 'correctness' and 'incorrectness' of avant-garde practice. Peter Gidal maintains the need to reject narrative because it inevitably involves the processes of identification and illusion which subtend the ideological effectiveness of cinema.¹⁵ Rejection of narrative is thereby soldered to a notion of cinematic autonomy. Constance Penley uses the narrative/non-narrative dichotomy in the opposite way. She argues that minimalism, denial of signification, involving avoidance of codes typical of narrative, surrenders to the fetishism 'inherent' in the cinema and an affirmation of 'the potency of the paternal function, thus exhibiting a very strong identification with the law'.¹⁶

Clearly the narrative/non-narrative dichotomy retains a decisive role in defining the terms of opposition of avant-garde cinema towards dominant narrative forms. Both in *Trapline* and *Syntax* the impulsion to grasp for meaning, to narrativise against all the odds is very strong. Even the most urgent attempts at non-narrative film-making cannot prevent the dominant institution from being a reference point for the spectator. As Stephen Heath argues:

'What is interesting here is to grasp the extent to which narration is in our imaginary of film as important as and in fact, more important than, narrative: film that imaginary has it (supported by the conventional systems of address in narrative cinema), must be representation for, in order, directed towards something for someone (narrative as common ground of film and spectator)'.¹⁷

But if this narration 'in our imaginary' is insistent, Heath allows

13 *Afterimage* n7, 1978.

14 Wollen, op cit, p84.

15 Peter Gidal, 'Identifying Non-Narrative', *Film Form* v1 n2, 1977.

16 Constance Penley, 'The Avant-Garde and its Imaginary', *Camera Obscura*, n2 pp24-25.

17 and subsequent quotations, from Stephen Heath, 'Repetition Time', *Wide Angle* v2 n3, p9.

that it is at least possible to work against it. In a film such as Peter Gidal's *Condition of Illusion* a central point of vision and coherence is refused by 'the repetition, the disturbing return of the signifier across the signs of any narration . . .'. So Gidal's structural/materialist practice may operate against the grain, against the imaginary's demand for a 'representation for, in order, directed towards something for someone'.

Heath goes on to argue, however, that the history of the processes which bring the spectator to the central point of coherence, 'the history of the subject', is neglected by structural/materialism. Three terms – preconstruction, construction/reconstruction, and passage – are introduced to account for this history. 'Preconstruction involves the ready-made positions of meaning that a film may adopt . . .'. This ranges through political arguments to the codes and orders of language, conventions of colour as well as genre. 'Construction is the totalising of a more or less coherent subject position in the film as its end, its purpose, the overall fiction of the subject related.' 'Passage is the performance of the film' and the taking up of the spectator 'as subject in its process'. He argues that in structural/materialist film the presentation of the process of the film narrows its area of concern to that of *passage* – 'which is to say that it minimalises construction-reconstruction by the eviction of narrative, and preconstruction by the reduction as far as possible of given signifieds'. This leads him to the conclusion that structural/materialist cinema '"forgets" preconstruction and construction-reconstruction, the historical problem of meaning and subject position, in the interests of stressing the experience of the film in the viewing situation which is then given a sufficiency, and in the end, an existence outside contradiction, the concern with "materiality" becoming a defined and limited project with its confirmed audience – and its own cultural trap'.

But even with the 'eviction of narrative' and the reduction of signifieds there are still some terms on which the history of the subject through preconstruction and construction-reconstruction is taken up by Gidal. These become clear I think when consideration is given to the specific terms of reading of Gidal's 'confirmed audience'. There are perhaps two aspects of these terms of reading that Gidal takes up. At the more general level Gidal attempts to confront a personalised artisan-like type of film making and to break with the transcendent authorial role so easily connected with it. As Deke Dusinberre argues in relation to *Room Film* 1973: ' . . . its tactics of repetition and contradiction and illegibility posit a non-specific and fragmented artistic subject entering the complex social practices of image-making on a film which urgently engages the aesthetic subject in the process of meaning making'.¹⁸ 'The process of meaning making' is not confined solely

¹⁸ and subsequent quotations, Deke Dusinberre, 'Consistent Oxymoron: Peter Gidal's Rhetorical Strategy', *Screen* Summer 1977, v18 n2, p88.

110 to the exhibition of films. In Gidal's case this means that attention should be paid as much to the polemical nature of his writings as to his films. Gidal sees a problem in the relationship between criticism and film which his own practice (writing and films together) serves to highlight. As he says: 'A danger is in seeing critical work as theoretical, and in seeing polemics as negating theory, and criticism *per se* as synthesising, bridging because it 'objectively' analyses from 'an external' viewpoint. That precisely is where ideology hides'.¹⁹ This demonstrates the second aspect of the terms of reading which Gidal deals with, the effect of theoretical discourses on the preconstruction of the avant-garde spectator. Such discourses are, of course, especially relevant to avant-garde film-making, but as Dusiñberre argues: '... Gidal regards neither the "voice" of the theoretician nor the "eye" of the film maker as a privileged or transcendent subject, but insists on their inscription – on all levels – as operative factors in theoretical and cinematic discourse'.

The denial of a privileged position for either theoretician or film-maker requires a constant search for a subject position, a search for a total meaning between film and theory. The search for meaning in Gidal's work has been described by Phillip Drummond, in discussing Gidal's *Silent Partner*, as being encouraged by 'personalising the trajectory of Gidal's wandering camera'. But the narrative of 'search' or 'journey' which is set up consists of 'a set of lures for the spectator, who, contrary to expectations will not see these intuitions contextualised as "subjectivity" within the film ...'.²⁰ This contradictoriness in the films which defeats our search for meaning leads us to turn to the writings. But in the writings as much as the films, as Dusiñberre points out: 'Especially, Gidal has adopted that trope of contradiction – oxymoron – as his emblem'. Exactly though, it is 'his emblem'. The sense of a human control of the camera, the frequent use of domestic space, and in *Fourth Wall* (1978) the appearance of Gidal himself briefly, all serve to make the author the locus of contradiction. To avoid being pinned down as a punctual source of meaning requires a constant elusiveness which can only be successful with a superior knowledge of where that locus will be next.

The positive side to Gidal's work is the way in which the presumed authorial position is tangled and fragmented with contradictions. But on the other hand the constant elusiveness necessary to maintain such a position must make us hesitate, as Dusiñberre does, as to whether what eludes us, the artistic subject, is 'in the tradition of Hebraic theology which describes G-d as that which cannot be named but merely alluded to, a G-d not

¹⁹ Gidal, *op cit* p67.

²⁰ Phillip Drummond, 'Questions of Independent Cinema: Realism and Narrativity', *Catalogue British Film Institute Productions 1977-1978*, London 1978 p74.

manifest but potential . . .'. Further though, there is a radical attempt to come to terms with the conjuncture of his type of film making and his 'confirmed audience', Gidal cannot totally escape the 'narration in our imaginary of film'. Any semblance of narrative may be expunged from his films but the 'story' of his work has to be told to explain his position. For the conjuncture is one in which, as Phillip Drummond puts it: 'The production of stories, and so of story-tellers and their audiences, thus sets in motion a complex and important "effect of knowledge", with the result that narrativity itself comes to occupy an ideological and political pre-eminence in the human subject's self-construction and construction by the world of "knowing"'.²¹ 111

Eventually, then, there is some point in the reception of his films, where it is impossible for Gidal to control the terms of discourse in which they are taken up. Although by presenting his polemical writing as an accompaniment to his films, Gidal is attempting to question the relationship between readings of avant-garde films and theoretical/critical discourses, by avoiding narrative he avoids one of the major terms of that relationship. The result of the rejection of narrative by Gidal (and others in the English avant-garde) may therefore be a refusal to question a major term in readings of the avant-garde – and of their own work! While films such as *Trapline* and *Syntax* fail to confront overtly the terms of their own readings, they do at least considerably complicate the position of the spectator in narrativisation. Such work must continue to be important while narrative is such an insistent element in readings of films.

21 Drummond, *op cit* p71.

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'On Authorship'
A Reply

Vincent Porter

I should like to comment upon and extend Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling's article *On Authorship* which appeared in the last issue of *Screen*. In seeking to develop a holistic study of the question of authorship, Clayton and Curling raise a number of questions about the relationship between copyright law and current practices, about the relationship between critical discourse and the funding, distribution and exhibition of independent films and conclude with an analysis of the theoretical implications of the model contract agreed in 1977 between the IFA and the BFI Production Board. By choosing a holistic approach and by concluding their article with an examination of the IFA/BFI Production Board contract, the authors leave unexplored a number of questions of more general theoretical significance and it is some of these problems which I wish to explore. In broadening the scope of their analysis it will, I hope become clear both that the conclusions which they draw from their particular analysis are not necessarily more widely applicable and that those elements of their analysis which are more widely applicable carry significant implications for materialist film theory.

COPYRIGHT AND JOINT AUTHORSHIP Copyright in UK law is an *alienable* right. That is, the person who owns it, whether psysical or legal, can dispose of it by legal contract. Moral rights in European law are, on the other hand, in a general sense *inalienable*; thus they cannot be disposed of by legal contract – although in some cases they can be inherited. It is important also to emphasise that in current UK law the right to copy, project or broadcast the films belongs to 'the maker' who is described as 'the person by whom the arrangements necessary for the making of the film are undertaken' (Copyright Act 1956 s13(10)). Unlike copyright in

114 literary, musical and dramatic works which the Act ascribes to 'authors', film copyright does not distinguish between the elements of intellectual and of manual labour involved in production but is awarded to the person, physical or legal, organising the labour power necessary for the production of the film that, in normal film-making practice represents the interest of capital. The question of editorial autonomy for film labour is thus a question of the contractual relations between labour and capital at the moment when the arrangements for financing the production of the film are made – or, in those rare cases when film-makers are employed on a permanent, ie waged, basis – on the contractual relations when they are employed by the production company. While it may well be that the precedent of editorial autonomy for joint-authored works established by the IFA/BFI Production Board Agreement depended heavily on the interplay of the discourses of Authorship and of film copyright, as Clayton and Curling indicate, the assimilation of the ideology of author's right (and thus of author's rights) into British copyright law as advocated by Whitford would not assist the general project of retaining editorial autonomy for film labour for a number of reasons.

First, as Clayton and Curling correctly point out, Whitford's proposal for joint authors of films, if enacted, would enable any one of the joint authors of a film to prevent any editorial amendment of the work whatever the wishes of the majority of other authors. Second, as I noted in my article, *Film Copyright: Film Culture* (Screen Spring 1978, v19 n1) the wording of Article 14bis of the Stockholm and Paris texts of the Berne Convention replaces the concept of the author (or authors) of a cinematographic work with the concept of the copyright owner. Third, any such move would *legislate* for a division between the intellectual and manual labour involved in the production of a film since either the Act itself or the Courts would have to clarify at some point in time which physical persons involved in the production of a film should be deemed 'author' or 'joint authors'. In parenthesis, I would also note that the latest working document of the Commission of the European Community on Aids to the Film Industry (273/IV/78-EN) proposes that the cultural features of films could be protected by requiring that *at most* (my emphasis) the scriptwriter and the director of the film should be nationals of any one member state (para 2.4).

I conclude therefore that to adopt a system of author's right in the UK would at best make no change to the material and cultural conditions of film-workers and at worst would legislate for a permanent division between intellectual and manual film labour.

THE ORGANISATION OF FILM LABOUR Unlike many areas of organised film labour, the policy of the IFA is to represent both the economic and the cultural interests of its members. This meant

that its negotiations with the BFI were seen as a dual struggle 115
first to secure (more) money for film-makers and second to secure
that money without compromising their practices or abandoning
their rights as film-makers to control their films. While it is no
doubt true that the success of the IFA in achieving these aims in the
negotiations was influenced by a model of authorship deriving from
an imprecise understanding of UK copyright law and from a model
of Authorship derived from the dominant practices of critical
discourse, the objective result has been an agreement made
between (state) film capital and organised (independent) film labour.
Clayton and Curling's basic presupposition that film circulation is
conditioned by discourse is not challenged by this emphasis on
the role of the IFA as an organiser of film labour. On the contrary,
it foregrounds the need to consider the relations between critical
discourse on film and organised film labour. A clear example of
this need may be seen from the parallel situation of dramatic and
musical performers with respect to the cultural control of their
labour.

Performance is another area of labour which challenges the
division of labour into intellectual and manual labour. Indeed it
is precisely because dramatic and musical performances contain
elements of both intellectual and manual labour that dramatic and
musical performers have unique rights in British law by which they
can control the mechanical or electrical recording of their labour.
Unlike many European countries which have provided for a 'per-
former's right', British law stipulates that no person may record
a performance either visually or aurally without the written agree-
ment of the person involved. Since many drama, musical and film
performances are of a collective nature, or involve multiple per-
formances, this stipulation placed the performers unions – particu-
larly British Actors Equity and the Musicians Union – in an espe-
cially strong bargaining position in their negotiations with em-
ployers. Despite this legal advantage however, the controls that
performers exert over their work and the controls that the Unions
sought to exert on behalf of their members were *economic* in nature
and not *cultural*. The reasons for this are complex and merit further
research, but we can conclude, in a general sense, as Clayton and
Curling presuppose, that film circulation was and is conditioned
by discourse.

The particular discourses which surrounded the negotiations of
the performers' unions were no doubt complex and involved the
performers' conceptions of their own creative role in the produc-
tion of films and the need to generate a policy acceptable to all
sections of the respective unions as well as the dominant critical
discourse relating to films at that time. Nevertheless it is possible
to isolate from this complex of discourses those of the performers
themselves and those of the dominant discourse of film criticism.
Just as Clayton and Curling point to the overlap of the dominant

- 116 discourse of film Authorship with the discourse among independent film-makers to control the circulation of their own films, so it is possible to point to the historic *absence* in critical discourse of any assessment of the role of the many performers who are essential to the production of a feature film be they session musicians, extras and bit players or leading actors or actresses. I conclude therefore that the absence of a relationship of critical discourse to discourse among film labour and among organised elements of film labour in particular plays a key role in the circulation of films.

FILM LABOUR AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE There have been two dominant critical practices in recent years, the first based on the analysis of film texts and the second, developed by *Screen* since 1975, exploring the relation between the signifier and the viewing subject. At certain other moments, *Screen* has also concerned itself with the conditions of production of a film, but it has never consistently concerned itself with the relationship between the producing subject or subjects and the signifier. The conclusion which I draw from Clayton and Curling's analysis is for the need to develop such a project in a consistent manner. The problems involved in such a project are substantial for they force the film analyst to face the ideological conditioning which the institution of cinema imposes on an operation of textual analysis. Whether the analysis concerns the text itself or the relationship between the text and the viewing subject, in both cases the analysis must perforce accept the division of labour, the relations of production and the discourses of the dominant forces of film production which existed at the moment of production and are embedded in the film text. Thus Brewster was forced to conclude in his textual analysis of *Young Mr Lincoln* (*Screen* Autumn 1973, v14 n3, p 41) that since the generic code of the youth of the hero and the specific ideological motivation within the film text of the Hayes-Tilden compromise were 'much less specific to the text and probably to the political conjuncture of its production than the *Cahiers* analysis suggested'; and since the 'cracks' between the motivations were 'due to the interaction of these very broad sub-codes with the Fordian sub-code – the textual system constituted by Ford's films – and hence this system/code (was) of more importance than the *Cahiers* analysis implied'.

It seems to me that two types of problem arise from this dependence upon the film text which is of course a widespread analytical practice by no means limited to Brewster. The first is that film analysis must be able to distinguish between the broad sub-codes specific to the political conjuncture of the film's production and those specific to the film text precisely so that in any analysis it is possible to clarify the relationship between the political conjuncture of production and the text. The second is

that subcodes, such as the Fordian subcode, present grave problems for materialist film analysis in that although they distinguish between the author and the author subcode as inscribed in the film text, they fail to stress the extent to which the inscription of that subcode within the text is dependent upon the relations of production and the division of labour established by the institution of cinema. The distinction drawn by Clayton and Curling, following Foucault, between the *author*, and the *Author* involves two sets of relations. The first is that, already recognised between the author and the author subcode. The second is between the author subcode and the *Author* as used in the discourse on authorship. It is clear that for any one film, the difference between the author and the author subcode is constant while the difference between the author subcode and the *Author* may vary between critical discourses. I conclude therefore that one of the tasks of a materialist film analysis must be to deconstruct the authorial subcode to reveal the true relations between the author and the author subcode. This then presents film analysis with the problem of mapping not only those codes that are structured within the text but also those which are structurally absent from the text. It seems to me that any analysis which ignores this difference lays itself open to the charge of accepting the relations of production and the division of labour inscribed in the film and thus continuing to contribute to the confusion between the author and the *Author*. 117